NMP

#2
JULY

MARGARET O'CONNELL
JAMES VAN HISE
KURT BUSIEK
CHUCK HUBER
LOU MOUGIN
RICH MORRISSEY

BILL DANCH
RICHARD HOWELL
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and more!

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LOC

Fandom's Forum

#2
JULY

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LINES
OF COMMUNICATION

by Richard Howell

Welcome to the second issue of **LOC.** The response to our first issue has been very favorable, and all of us—we two editors and our publisher—are pleased to know that comics fans will still welcome a forum for communication. We have received several letters about **LOC #1,** full of suggestions and encouragement—some of which we've printed to share with all our readers.

We should also mention the letters that **didn't** appear in our letter column. As we've stated, we see **LOC** as a link between different locales of fandom, and the different ideas which exist in them. We want fans to get talking, and writing, to us, and to each other. That's our purpose. Just think of us as the 1960-Julius Schwartz letter columns of the 1980s [a very comfortable image, that]. We'd be thrilled to be able to achieve half that much **impetus for communication** among our readers.

But frankly, some of the letters we've received run counter to that spirit of free exchange of ideas—not so much that they're not offering alternative opinions as in that they're just insulting. Nobody needs to be told that their opinions are "obnoxious"—certainly not as part of an argument that's supposed to enlighten him [as well as other readers] about aspects about the subject of his essay which he might not have considered. If one of our columnists presents what we feel is a well-reasoned, level-headed argument to prove his opinions, and we get letters about it which states that "[name deleted] is wrong. I like [name of publication deleted], and if he doesn't, what's he doing reading comics anyway?"—then we do not feel obliged to print it. Responses like that are not "communication" in any meaningful sense; they're just unreasoned [and unreasonable] knee-jerk defenses of one reader's gut reaction. They're purposely insulting and denigrating to the sensibilites of the writers, the editors, and the readers.

And we won't print 'em.

Rather than viewing this statement of policy as a barrier toward free expression of reader reaction, try and think of it as a goad towards expression of those same reactions in constructive, instructive, and polite manners. Sharing opinions means sharing respect, too. •

LETTERHACK'S NIGHTMARES #6

The character development on Captain Dogbuscuit lately has been superlative, particularly when he's in battle. Furthermore...
I rilly liked da way Da Captain creemed dose bad guys...
We so proud!
Congratulations, son!
Say, Doug, did you see Freddy's letter?
Oh, boy!
BANG BANG
A TIP OF THE HAT TO
John V. Cody of Mass.
Send your ideas c/o LOC

by Tom Linehan

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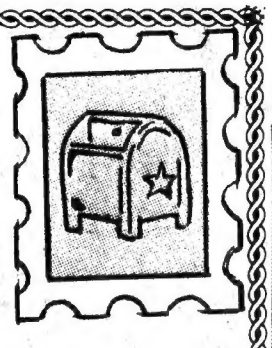

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GOD AND MAN IN COMIC BOOKS

PART ONE

by Lou Mougin

It seems that God has been pretty busy these days, and, according to comic books, He's pretty partial to super-heroes.

In the past few years [so goes the comic mythos] God has: called The Spectre on the carpet for killing a mortal, and then let bygones be bygones no matter how many mortals get butchered by the Ghostly Guardian; cleansed Dr. Strange of vampirism and ignored Dracula, who was holding onto the magician for dear unlife; freed Captain Canuck from at least **one** deathtrap; resurrected the Justice Society; dispatched a gold-skinned angel to plague Dracula and then to merge with the body of the vampire's infant son; personally rescued The Ghost Rider from the Devil [while tastefully clad in work shirt and jeans]; and, finally, commissioned His own super-hero, The Seraph—who incorporates the powers of Samson, Moses, Solomon, and Elijah like a Jewish Captain Marvel. Yes, He **does** seem to get around...

Since the early 1970s, comics writers have been annexing every pantheon they can get their hands on onto the Marvel and DC universes. If no preexisting god will fill the bill, a shimmed-up one made to order will do. And, with Cthuloid, Norse, Chaldean, Chinese, Indian, Greco-Roman [in several different varieties], Native American, African, Irish-Cimmerian, and specially-manufactured gods popping up in comic books [along with a baker's dozen of customized Satans], it might seem **discriminatory** to exclude Yahweh.

Unfortunately, Yahweh comes off no better than any of the others in the translation. Nor, for that matter, does any contemporary religion that has been treated in comics.

Just as super-hero scribes can't seem to think of a future beyond world devastation, so none of them seemingly can say anything about religion that doesn't involve fanaticism and power-hungry Jim Jones-style ministers. Usually, we're treated to such noble denominations as the Church of Satan [in **TOMB OF DRACULA**], a suicide cult [in **GHOST RIDER**], the adherents of the Nameless Ones [in **THE DEFENDERS**], the followers of evil Jeremiah [in **MARVEL TEAM-UP**], Set-worshippers, the Sons of Satannish, and Cthuloid cults [in **DOCTOR STRANGE**], Entropists, a Scientologist, a demented Hare Krishna-ist, a supersalesman Christ figure, self-help devotees led by an ersatz Hitler, and both Yucchies and Wacckies [in **HOWARD THE DUCK**], and, yes, even a cult that awaited the second coming of Superman. Comics have portrayed a large and varying branch of the faithful, but in almost all cases, their faith has been shown as shallow, baseless, insipid, and devoted to evil purposes.

After all, it makes for good stories. You couldn't have Dr. Strange fighting the Southern Baptists, but the Church of Sligguth is as sure a bet as a terminal disease on **MARCUS WELBY.**

It hasn't always been this way. Prior to the 1970s, comics handled religion gingerly or not at all. Even their brief flirtations with the subject are interesting enough to examine, which will be the concern of this installment. I do **not** intend to focus on

The Cult of the Nameless Ones from *THE DEFENDERS:* "If no preexisting god will fill the bill...one made to order will do."

those comic books devoted to out-and-out religious propaganda, such as **PICTURE STORIES FROM THE BIBLE,** the Spire and Jack T. Chick publications or **TREASURE CHEST.** Marvel's and DC's writers don't overtly use their paper podiums for religious conversion; belief is only an element in their stories.

What those beliefs are, and how they are presented, make for an interesting study.

Religion, of course, was a touchy subject even in the pre-Code days. Publishers could get by with slavering vampires and hatchet murders, but most of them shied away from topics of faith. However, there **was** an element of the Supreme Being in the tales of The Spectre, who was presented as no less than a deputy of God.

Periodically, whenever the Grim Ghost needed help, he was able to ascend to an undefined "next world" which appeared to be no more than a barren grey expanse. The Spectre would then confer with a disembodied voice, which [though the writer never said so] we all knew was God's. Usually this was handled with some restraint. God was unseen and omnipresent, less tied to a religion than to the unending cosmos. And, oftentimes, The Spectre would bring a villain to an untimely and unpretty demise with no interference from Up Above. If The Spectre had a religion, it was derived from the Old Testament.

There were many other ghost characters in the Golden Age, most notably MLJ's Mr. Justice and Quality's Kid Eternity, and though there were hints of a force that allowed them to operate, none were ever tied to a specific form of ritual or belief.

The Devil was **another** matter. Satan has apparently been in the public domain ever since he gave Job a nasty case of the boils, and, as John Milton, Stephen Vincent Benet, and William Peter Blatty have found out, he makes for good copy. Accurate to the original or not, fictional Devils have abounded in world literature for centuries. Comic books are not exempt.

In one Timely series, Satan gave a murdered woman the power to return to Earth as his personal emissary, The Black Widow. She was, without any exaggeration, the most frightening female character in comics. She outscared The Spectre all hollow with her demonic, soul-stealing gaze, and it probably says something for the ethos of comics creators that both she and the Ace of Shades used similar **modus operandi** even though they were employed by such different agencies. Consistency be damned [probably literally].

In the early 1950s, EC made the first [and practically the only] attempt to deal with agnosticism in a story by Al Feldstein and Wally Wood. **"He Walked Among Us" [WEIRD SCIENCE #13]** told the story of Jerry Kraft, a space traveller who crash-landed on a planet which was in a medieval state of progress. When he attempted humanistic reform and performed "miracles" with the healing rays and nutritional capsules, Kraft ran afoul of the local political machinery. They stretched him to death on a rack, but that very rack became the symbol for that world's new religion which deified Kraft and encircled the planet. As the Kraftians explained their beliefs to two later emissaries from Earth, one of the Terrans scratched his head and remarked that their religion sounded quite... familiar. EC received passionate mail on that one, both pro and con. As a result, few fans mentioned **"He Walked Among Us"** or dealt with

YOU DARE DEFY ME...THE HIGH PRIEST?
EXACTLY! THE RABBLE, AS YOU CALL THEM, HAVE COME TO DEPEND ON ME! AS I SEE IT, YOU BOYS IN THE 'HIGHER' CASTE HAVE BEEN TAKING ADVANTAGE OF YOUR PEOPLE... TO PUT IT MILDLY!
©1981 EC Comics

A scene from *"He Walked Among Us."*

it in fanzine articles for about twenty years, until **RBCC** blew the cover on it in the middle 1970s. Actually, the EC piece was patently inoffensive—even Kraft's death happens off-panel. The most the tale could do to any reader would be to make him **think.** And **that** is probably why we've heard so much about surgical baseball games and so little about Jerry Kraft in EC articles.

Another **WEIRD SCIENCE** offering dealt with religion peripherally in an O. Henry manner. A it, a spacecraft full of moralizing censors landed on a

planet and vowed to reform it. Surprisingly, the planet had no sex crimes [though sexual material was allowed in print], no murders [though crime stories abound in bookstores], no robbery [though there was plenty of unguarded wealth], and no need for censorship. Well, said the champions of morality, something must be **done** about that! They prepared a campaign to reinstate promiscuity, violence, and theft on that world and so put their blue pencils back to work, but their unseen master nixes the plan when they radioed it in: Get out of there, says he, you fools have blundered into...**Heaven!**

The Code put a stop to such practices, good or bad. From 1955 to the late 1960s, few comics ever mentioned the name of God. Religion was taboo. No super-hero was ever caught going to church, except for a wedding [and even then, the Richardses and the Pyms plighted their troths in their own super-hero headquarters]. Nobody ever struggled with the nuances of belief. When "gods" did turn up in **WONDER WOMAN** or **THOR,** they were little more than super-heroes. Nobody would ever have known that Odin had once been worshipped from reading his stories in **"Tales of Asgard."**

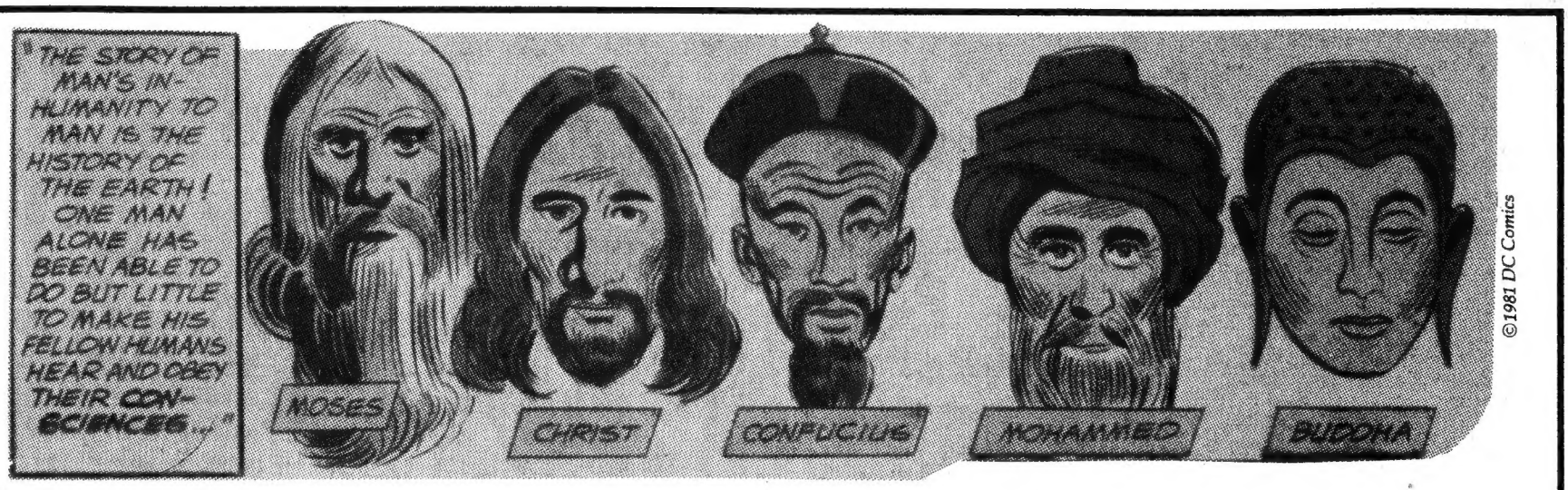
But that barrier was slowly breached. One comics group, in particular, never **acknowledged** that barrier.

The American Comics Group had built their small but stable line-up [**FORBIDDEN WORLDS, ADVENTURES INTO THE UNKNOWN,** etc.] from the late 1940s onward on a foundation of horror-supernatural tales. Unlike today's tawdry bunch of unrelated ghost titles, ACG books evolved their own cosmology. According to editor Richard Hughes, the dead immediately materialized in a waiting-station realm in space called The Unknown. [It resembled nothing so much as the cloud-floored Heaven of Kid Eternity.] The place was run by Grim Reapers, civil servant spirits who talked in slang and had the unenviable job of keeping Heaven and Hell happy. If you wanted to return to Earth and seek vengeance, or just to look up old pals, all you had to do was convince a Reaper to give you a supernatural four-day pass. The Devil showed up several times as a comic figure [I recall one story which had him brandishing a trident ordered from Sears & Roebuck], but Heaven's minions were rarely seen. The Unknown appeared in scores of anthology stories and even in **HERBIE,** and in one case it even spawned a super-hero, Nemesis. He was the ghost of a murdered private eye who was given the power to return to Earth as an avenging spirit. Thankfully, he wasn't as overpowered as The Spectre. Nemesis could be kayoed, dissipated in water, drowned, asphyxiated, or burned. No kryptonite syndrome for **him!** Nemesis ran for about two years, almost until ACG folded in 1967.

About that time, DC started loosening up on its supernatural taboos. First, Julius Schwartz ran the famous **FLASH** story, **"Doorway Into the Unknown,"** in which a crook's ghost comes back to have The Flash save his victim's life. In such a hyper-scientific series as the 1960s **FLASH,** the story impacted like a cannon shell. It was as though someone had run a Lovecraft story in **ANALOG.** The story won an Alley Award that year. Among the ramifications of **"Doorway"** was that writers John Broome and Gardner Fox were free to experiment—within limits.

AND SO THE LOVERS WERE REUNITED---IN DEATH---
AFTER ALL--- IT'S GREAT BEING A GHOST!
YOU WON'T THINK SO NEXT ISSUE, NEMESIS--- NOT WHEN YOUR POWER IS CHALLENGED AS IT NEVER WAS BEFORE! DON'T MISS A GREAT STORY, READER!
THE END!
12
©1981 AGC Group

During the same period, Fox struck with two religiously-oriented stories. The first was in **JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA #40, "Indestructable Creatures of Nightmare Island."** It was another in the style of the great JLA "moralistic" tales, with the "villain" being a humanitarian hero. Andrew Helm, an American reared in the Shangri-La-like-city of Ta Chieng, saw his fellow villagers slaughtered by bandits. A lesser writer might have had Helm vow vengeance on the human race and plot world destruction. Fox had him yearn to give the world a conscience, and design a machine to wipe hatred and aggression from human minds. The religious element entered the story when Helm contemplated the men who had already tried to give the world a conscience [Buddha, Confucius, Moses, Christ, Mohammed, and Lao-Tse turned up in cameo]. That was the first appearance of the founders of living major religions in a super-hero story. It was not, by any means, the least.


"THE STORY OF MAN'S IN-HUMANITY TO MAN IS THE HISTORY OF THE EARTH! ONE MAN ALONE HAS BEEN ABLE TO DO BUT LITTLE TO MAKE HIS FELLOW HUMANS HEAR AND OBEY THEIR CON-SCIENCES..."
MOSES
CHRIST
CONFUCIUS
MOHAMMED
BUDDHA
©1981 DC Comics

The first appearance in comics of the leaders of the world's religions; from *JUSTICE LEAGUE #40.*

Several weeks later, **SHOWCASE #59** hit the stands. DC had a ghostly super-hero in its ranks once again with **"The Spectre,"** in a **"War That Shook the Universe."** This and subsequent adventures shook the DC cosmology as well.

The story had tones of awesomeness, but not horror. Author Fox handled The Spectre as he did The Atom, Flash, or The Justice League and treated mysticism as another form of science—in effect, demythologizing it. Crooks who shot at The Spectre's ghostly form and saw him swallow bullets were awed, but not terrified. And, when the ghost-hero grew hundreds of feet tall to hand two thieves to the cops at a station house, an officer only comment was that The Spectre sure was **busy** that night. "Spec" smiled and said, "The charge is attempted robbery this time!" The Spectre's powerful origin story was reserved for a text; DC would not, at this time, opt for that kind of supernaturalism.

The next issue, **"Beyond the Sinister Barrier,"** dealt with religion in a more direct manner. This time, "Spec" was up against a villain at least his match, a cosmic demon named Shathan. The story began with Shathan's stealing shadows from people whom he converted into pawns to pave his way into Earth's dimension. The Spectre was drawn into the conflict, and, while on a mist-enshrouded waterfront, heard fog horns becoming a Voice from Beyond. The spiritual dispatcher ordered The Spectre to block Shathan's entry, or, failing that, to send him packing.

To gather information, The Spectre travels all the way back to Creation. Fox evidently subscribed to the "Big Bang" theory, as he depicted all matter in that primordial time enclosed in a titanic Primal Atom. A bolt of force from without shoots into the sphere and causes a cosmic explosion, scattering matter throughout the universe. The Spectre realizes that nothing could survive that maelstrom of creation and flees through time and space.

From his vantage point, the Spectre sees the creation of Shathan. Unlike the Christian Devil, who is supposedly an angel gone wrong, Shathan and his hellish realm are born as an equal and opposite reaction from the Creation. As Fox puts it in a caption, "For **Him** who is **good**—there is **Shathan**, who is **evil**!" However, Shathan never exhibits quite the power that is attributed to God, so in this department he is closer to Satan than to Ahriman.

Fox again includes a panel full of religious leaders such as Moses and Buddha, while laying at Shathan's feet the responsibility for spiritual evil [Moses is shown smashing the golden calf]. Now that the Spectre knows his foe's pedigree, he is ready to do battle. But first, to strengthen himself, he must—literally—pick up good vibrations. [It is a tenet of Fox's writing that good and evil exist as energies and can pervade inanimate objects or radiate from good and evil deeds.] The Grim Ghost bathes in the aura of a prayer service and of a Green Beret toting a rifle in Vietnam [this **was** 1966!]. But, while he is doing this, Shathan has organized his worshippers and crossed from his world into Earth-Two via prayer-chants.

The Spectre arrives on the scene and he and Shathan have a pip of a battle all across the universe. In a burst of inspiration, the hero decides to toss his foe into various cataclysmic explosions in Earth's history to see if he comes apart. He tries a Russian H-bomb, a mysterious fireball, Krakatoa, and the interior of the sun. Nothing works. Finally, "Spec" lobs Shathan smack into the heart of the Primal Atom just before Creation. That works, and the demonic mastermind's ectoplasm is scattered across the cosmos, never to be reformed.

Fox is to be praised for his powerful and inoffensive way of handling this Miltonian story. Up to this point, the DC cosmology seemed to depict a Universal God, one whose spark could fire **any** religion devoted to "good." However, **some** tenets of this position just don't hold up under close scrutiny.

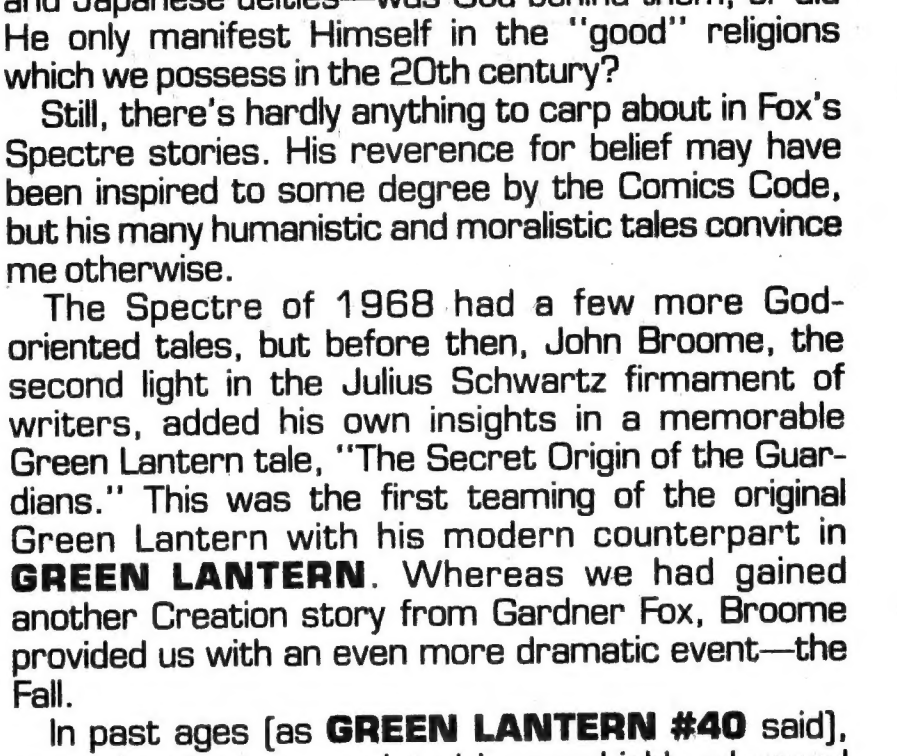
For example: How would one explain the conflicts between two "good" religions, such as Christianity and Islam, if God was in charge of both? How, moreover, could the ages-long conflict between

Judaism and Christianity, or Catholicism and Protestantism, be reconciled with the idea of a Universal God? And what of the many pre-modern religions devoted to Norse, Greek, Aztec, Chinese, and Japanese deities—was God behind them, or did He only manifest Himself in the "good" religions which we possess in the 20th century?

Still, there's hardly anything to carp about in Fox's Spectre stories. His reverence for belief may have been inspired to some degree by the Comics Code, but his many humanistic and moralistic tales convince me otherwise.

The Spectre of 1968 had a few more God-oriented tales, but before then, John Broome, the second light in the Julius Schwartz firmament of writers, added his own insights in a memorable Green Lantern tale, "The Secret Origin of the Guardians." This was the first teaming of the original Green Lantern with his modern counterpart in **GREEN LANTERN**. Whereas we had gained another Creation story from Gardner Fox, Broome provided us with an even more dramatic event—the Fall.

In past ages [as **GREEN LANTERN #40** said], the universe was populated by one highly-advanced race, the people of the planet Oa. Endowed with mighty telekinetic powers and great intellect, they co-existed peacefully with but one known taboo: they must never seek out the mystery of their origin, which was in truth the very origin of the universe. One scientist, Krona, dared the unthinkable by building a time-scanning video screen which he turned back to a near-Creation era. There he saw what had never been portrayed before in a super-hero comic: a gigantic Hand of cosmic proportion releasing galaxies into the void. Just as Krona attempted to view the antecedent events, a bolt of cosmic force blasted his apparatus to pieces. A Divine judgment had been pronounced, and, had not Krona been immortal, he too would have been destroyed.


...THAT IF WE EVER LEARNED THE TRUTH ABOUT OUR SECRET ORIGINS, WE AND OUR UNIVERSE WOULD BE INSTANTLY DESTROYED!
BAH! SUCH LEGENDS ARE TALES ONLY FOOLS WOULD FEAR!
DESPITE ALL RUMOR AND LEGEND, KRONA CONTINUED HIS CEASELESS LABORS AND ONE DAY...!
AN IMAGE FORMING--! A SHADOW LIKE A GIANT HAND...WITH SOMETHING...A CLUSTER OF STARS IN IT--! I MUST GO BACK FURTHER--! FURTHER--!
©1981 DC Comics
Krona in *GREEN LANTERN*: "[Broome]...deserves plaudits for his imaginative handling of the Fall mythos."

"From that moment on, evil was loose in the universe!" proclaimed a caption. The accompanying panel pictured a club-wielding caveman screaming **"Kill, kill!"** while beating his brother's brains out; it may have been another version of the Cain and Abel story. Krona was judged and condemned by the Oans to exile as a helpless batch of energy waves in the Earth-Two universe. To set things aright, the Oans became the Guardians of the Universe and started the Green Lantern Corps. Eons later, Krona managed to reform his body, return to the Earth-One universe, capture the Guardians and almost complete his forbidden experiment. He got as far as viewing the cosmic Hand again before the two Green Lanterns got him safely under wraps.

Again, the DC writers opted for a cosmic Christian mythology adapted to suit their needs. Broome handled the tale tastefully and with as much aplomb as Fox, and deserves plaudits for his imaginative handling of the Fall mythos. [In fact, what could create better suspense than a **second** Fall?] It appears that, during the 1960s, DC's religious ethos was theistic evolution. This was straddling a fence, appeasing both scientists and religionists—two power camps that could bring any pop entertainment low at the time. It worked admirably well.

Meanwhile, as all this was going on at DC, Marvel shied away from religious statements for many, many years. Stan Lee was more politically activist that any of his DC counterparts, as most of his Iron Man-versus-the-Commies stories attest. But he firmly nixed any religious propagandizing in his comics. The farthest he would go was to have Sue Storm pray for Ben Grimm's life in **FANTASTIC FOUR #43**, or Pepper Potts pray for Happy Hogan's life in **TALES OF SUSPENSE #71**; both prayers were mental, both referred to a "Lord" rather than "God," and neither lasted for more than a panel.

Of course, there was Thor, **god** of thunder, but nobody seemed to take him any more seriously than the Wonder Woman pantheon. After all, nobody **worshipped** Thor any more. It should be noted that in one **FANTASTIC FOUR** letters page, Stan presented a reader's comment that Thor was "good," but he believed in only **one** God, and the gaggle of Norse deities was a bit "hard to take." Not to worry, said Stan; Thor was only a **mythological** god, not in competition with any of the current brand names.

There were throw-away bits of theology lacing Lee's stories as the years went on. Once, when Sue Richards asked, "But what—can [Reed] do—against the all-powerful Silver Surfer?", The Watcher intoned, "All-powerful? There is only **one** who de-

serves that name! And **his** only weapon—is **love**!"

Quite a few readers congratulated Lee on that line, but in those years **everything** that Marvel did was canonized. Later on, Lee stirred up a mini-storm of controversy in **CAPTAIN AMERICA #105**. The scenario: Captain America and Batroc have only seconds to find a bomb that will destroy the entire city of New York. Batroc ducks out, taunting, "My so-great speed will take me to safety... while **you** stupidly risk your life for zee unthinking **masses**!"

"There was **another** who gave his life for the masses... many **centuries** ago," responded Cap. "And though he was the **wisest** one of all... **he** never thought of the humblest living being... as **undeserving**!"

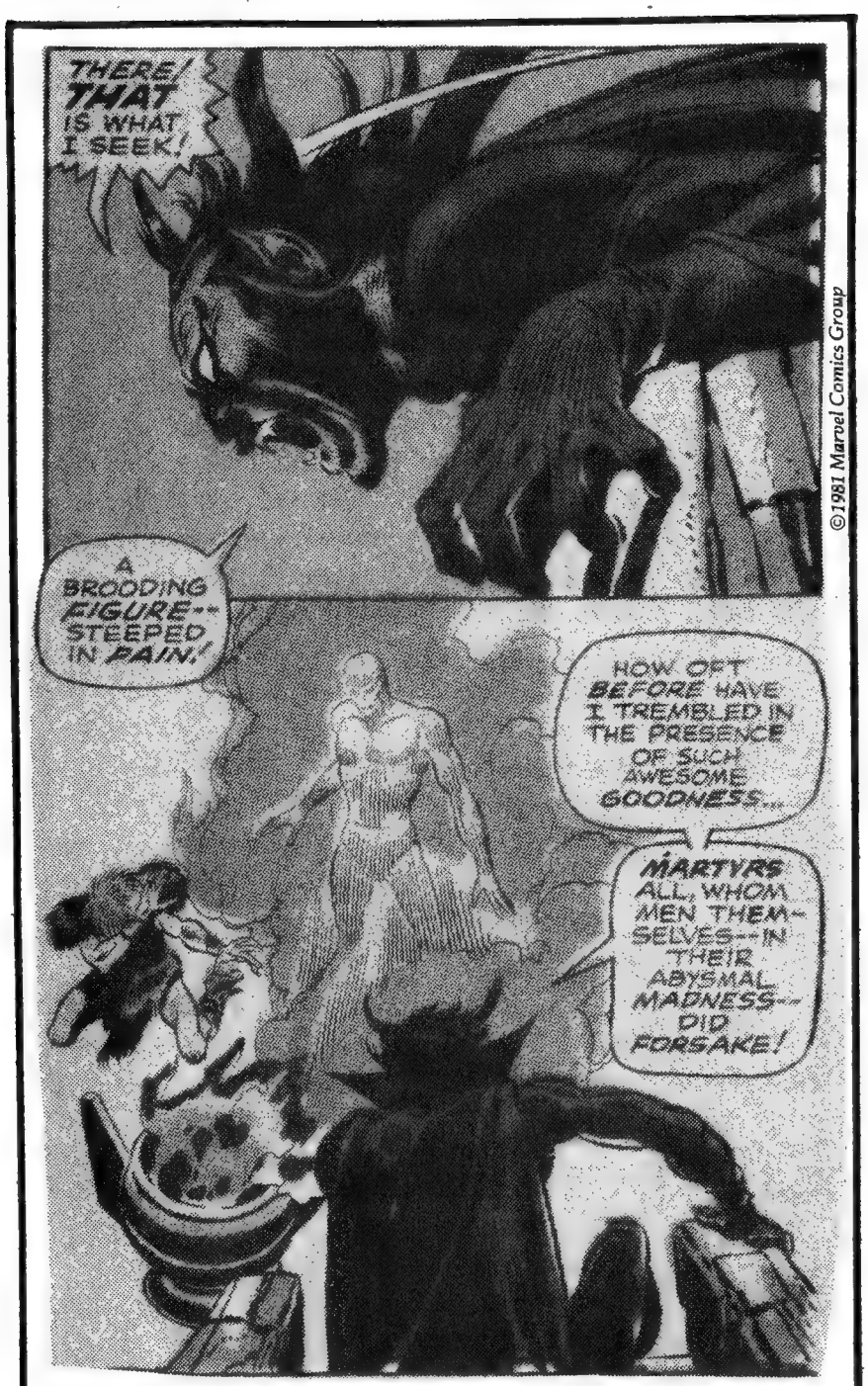
Nobody indoctrinated in Western culture could miss the implications of **that** remark. An offended reader wrote in to protest the reference to Christ. Others [among them, one Steve Gerber] wrote in to protest the protest. Still others contended that, if Captain America was a "real" person, then he would certainly be entitled to religious beliefs. Thus, the speech could be interpreted as his own personal statement rather than as propaganda. Marvel wisely let it lay, and it was a long time before Christianity was directly referred to again.

Allegories were something else altogether.

It was in 1969, in **SILVER SURFER #3** to be exact, that the Devil made his Marvel Age debut. The story is somewhat classic. The Surfer, the Messianic herald to Galactus, had grown into a cult hero and gathered Christlike undertones with his aura of pacifism and otherworldly power and holiness. He expressed compassion for the humans he transcended, while enduring the calumnies they heaped upon him every time he swooped down to lend a hand. So, what more fitting foe for The Surfer than the Great Adversary himself? And what better model for the

BUT WHAT...CAN HE DO...AGAINST THE ALL-POWERFUL SILVER SURFER??
ALL-POWERFUL? THERE IS ONLY ONE WHO DESERVES THAT NAME!
AND HIS ONLY WEAPON... IS LOVE!
©1981 Marvel Comics Group

The Watcher's "...throw-away bit of theology..."


THERE! THAT IS WHAT I SEEK!
A BROODING FIGURE--- STEEPED IN PAIN!
HOW OFT BEFORE HAVE I TREMBLED IN THE PRESENCE OF SUCH AWESOME GOODNESS...
MARTYRS ALL, WHOM MEN THEMSELVES--IN THEIR ABYSMAL MADNESS--DID FORSAKE!
©1981 Marvel Comics Group

Mephisto: The Devil of the Marvel Age.

story than that ultimate conflict, the Temptation of Christ?

Mephisto [never referred to directly as Satan or the Devil] is presented as a Doctor Doom of the Netherworld, always on the lookout for a new lever to power "so that victory may be **mine**—on the day of **Armageddon**!" The shadowy, frightening Hell-lord discovers the presence of The Surfer on Earth, kidnaps Shalla Bal, and then faces down the Sentinel of the Spaceways in Hell. He tempts the hero with earthly power, riches, and beautiful women, all of which The Surfer summarily rejects. "Never was Mephisto able to comprehend this strange emotion men call **love**!" muses the demon.

Finally, it comes down to battle. The Surfer is unable to out-power his foe in a one-on-one match, and ends up converted into energy and implanted in the Devil's brain. But his goodness pains Mephisto "like a canker!" and, unable to bend him to his will, he releases Norrin Radd from his body. Mephisto returns Shalla Bal to Zenn-La and The Surfer to Earth,

SUDDENLY...
POWER... YOU WISH POWER?... THEN SO BE IT!
WHA-?
WH-WHO SAID THAT?? WHO'S HERE?
A STRANGE, DISEMBODIED VOICE... A VOICE THAT FILLS THE ROOM, A VOICE THAT COMES FROM EVERYWHERE--AND NOWHERE AT THE SAME TIME... AND HOLDS OUR FRUSTRATED PROTAGONISTS SPELLBOUND...
WELL... UH...
WHO OR WHERE I AM IS NOT FOR YOU TO KNOW! ONLY THIS SHALL I TELL YOU-- YOU HAVE BEEN CHOSEN! I HAVE HEARD YOUR WISH AND IT SHALL BE GRANTED! YOU BOTH SHALL HAVE POWERS, IF THIS IS WHAT YOU SEEK! WHAT POWERS DO YOU WISH??
WAIT, WHOEVER YOU ARE! I'LL TELL YOU WHAT KIND OF POWERS I WANT...
©1981 DC Comics

"Steve Ditko's *HAWK AND THE DOVE* got their powers from a Voice..."

but vows that one day The Surfer will fall.

This dramatic Stan Lee story lacked the philosophical or scientific sophistication of the DC numbers, but it clouted like John L. Sullivan. In its favor were several points: that Mephisto only had the power to corrupt, not to physically destroy; that man [The Surfer] had the responsibility of rejecting or accepting temptation; and that God was not dragged onstage for an eleventh-hour rescue. "The Power and the Prize" remains one of the most effective devil-tales in comics. Few would match it even for the liberated Seventies.

However, Mephisto was just too good a villain for Stan to leave alone. So, like Dr. Doom and Magneto, the Devil had to pay his dues as a recurrent Marvel super-villain. He turned up again in **SILVER SURFER #8** and **#9** as a Prime Manipulator lusting for the Silver Surfer's soul. The theology in **this** story was more disorganized than a Lower Slobbovian snowplow committee! Basically, Mephisto's tool was the ghost of the Flying Dutchman, who had been condemned by Death to sail the seas forever for his crimes. Mephisto gave the Dutchman superpowers, changed his name to The Ghost, and sent him out to battle the Silver Surfer until the latter gave up his soul. Naturally, The Surfer refused. He even shed a tear for The Ghost, which released him from even Mephisto's bondage. In between the punches was a lot of cotton candy philosophy dealing with the immortality of the soul, virtue, evil, good, and the use of cosmic force-bolts against dead enemies.

Even worse was another sequel, in issue #16 and #17, wherein The Surfer actually surrendered to Mephisto to save innocent lives. For some reason or another, Mephisto had it in for Nick Fury and S.H.I.E.L.D. and ordered his pawn to destroy them. The Surfer kept his soul intact, Fury saved his own hide, and Mephisto went home angry again. Marvel's primal devil has made several other appearances—most notably in a **THOR** three-parter—but today is only one of a whole cadre of Satans in the Marvel Universe.

Back at DC, both Fox and Broome had departed and had been replaced by new faces, mostly ex-Charltoners such as Denny O'Neil and Steve Skeates. Skeates took over scripting The Spectre from Fox and immediately made changes in the format of the character's series, which brought the Ghostly Guardian face-to-Voice with God again. As it turned out, these were easily as powerful, and dealt more directly with religion, morality, and power, than any Spectre tales which preceded them.

Skeates' first tale opened with The Spectre conferring with Jim Corrigan, who huddled behind a garbage can in an alley. The cop refused to let his own ghost inside his own body until he took care of the gang of gunsels which was strafing the alley with gunfire. Tired and irritable, The Spectre flung off a powerburst that laid the evildoers low. He also caught an innocent bystander in the backwash

The Spectre

without noticing it. The Spectre's carelessness caused unjustified pain, and, later that night, he was summoned from Corrigan's body straight up to the Pearly Gates [complete with harps, iron-barred portals, and doves on the ground].

The Voice pronounced judgment on His errant deputy, and a reference to "The Mark of Cain" left the reader in no doubt as to **Whom** this "Voice" really belonged. The Spectre was burdened with a weakness that would afflict him in times of combat, changing in each circumstance. The Spectre later bemoaned the mistake which would haunt him to the end of his days. Compared to what lay ahead, a weakness would have been a suspended sentence.

The next issue, **SPECTRE #9**, saw Dick Giordano on as editor. Probably due to his experience with horror anthologies such as **GHOSTLY TALES**, he saw the book changed to a collection of slice-of-life stories with a weird twist, putting The Spectre in the background. The transitional tale was again handled by Skeates in an excellent follow-up to his previous issue. When Jim Corrigan and a fellow officer take on a gang of hoods, The Spectre materializes to save Jim from being shot in the back. Mercilessly, the ghost backs the terrified gunsel into a corner, shouts, "**Even your very life is forfeit!**"—and kills him. When Corrigan's pal protests that The Spectre had "no right **at all**!" to kill a hood he could easily have captured, he haughtily backhands the man into unconciousness. Corrigan confronts his alter ego with undisguised contempt.

"What's the matter with you, Spectre? Lately it seems as though you've been playing God!" accuses Corrigan.

"But, Jim," protests the spirit. "It's my **job**!"

"To kill is **nobody's** job! And you **killed** him!"

The Spectre is subsequently visited by The Voice again, and he is given a thick book labelled **The Journal of Judgment**. His job: to observe the lives of the mortals written in the book and to exercise the power of life and death over them. In this way, with this burden, The Spectre will learn how to judge righteously. He stalks off in a three-panel dolly shot, clutching the book under his arm.

This Spectre story, however good it might have been, doomed the series to a collection of uneven, chaotic, and disconnected morality plays ranging from excellence to excrescence. The Spectre was usually relegated to **deus ex machina** appearances on the last page, tying up loose ends and killing a villain. The book lasted one more issue and then went under lock, stock, and **Journal of Judgment**.

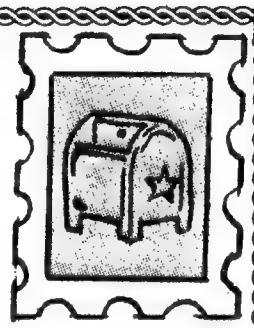
There were other notable God-stories during this period. Two adaptations appeared of Edgar Rice Burroughs' short story **"The God of Tarzan,"** by Charlton and Gold Key, and both were memorable. Bob Kanigher penned a Sgt. Rock tale, **"A Sparrow's Prayer,"** in **OUR ARMY AT WAR #207**, about a skinny G.I. who prayed for divine assistance in battle rather than picking up a gun. Three Hindu deities, including Shiva [portrayed as a villain], turned up in a Denny O'Neil **ATOM AND HAWKMAN**. And Steve Ditko's **HAWK AND THE DOVE** got their powers from a Voice which was accompanied by a purling green light. Whether this was the same being as The Spectre's commander was never explained.

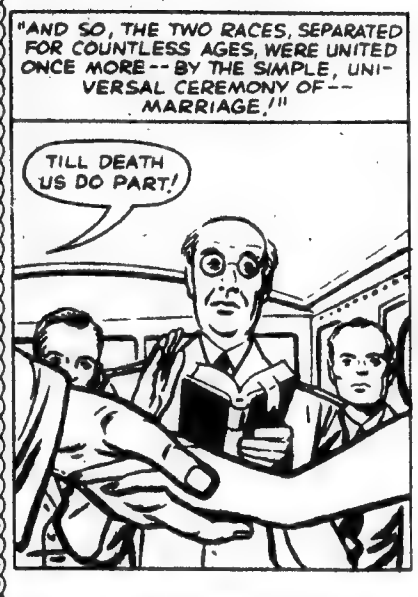
But things were changing in the comics world that would hold great import for the religion issue. Specifically, Stan Lee put out three issues of **SPIDER-MAN** in 1971 which dealt with drugs. None of them bore a Comics Code seal. Rather than admit that their censoring authority could be impudently disregarded with little hope of retribution, the Code officials liberalized their standards. Now, drugs could be presented, if they were shown in an evil light; vampires, werewolves, and Satanists weren't confined to black-and-white Warren magazines; mild sex scenes were okay; and—most importantly given our topic—religion was no longer taboo. Statements about belief, deities, and even organized religions could be made, so long as a thin patina of "taste" was maintained.

Comics in the Seventies could now handle religion openly, and even speculate about God.

How they handled religion, and **what** those speculations were, will be covered in our next installment. •

Margaret O'Connell is a student in Comparative Literature at Princeton Graduate School.




"AND SO, THE TWO RACES, SEPARATED FOR COUNTLESS AGES, WERE UNITED ONCE MORE -- BY THE SIMPLE, UNIVERSAL CEREMONY OF -- MARRIAGE!"
TILL DEATH US DO PART!

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CAN SUPER-HERO MARRIAGE BE SAVED?

by Margaret O'Connell

Richard Howell's article **"Sleaze and the Married Super-Hero"** in **COMICS FEATURE #6** raises a number of interesting questions about comics creators' pronounced aversion to permitting their super-powered charges to tie the knot. However, the article overlooks one of the most compelling explanations for comic book characters' traditional avoidance of matrimony: super-heroes who marry, by that very action, inevitably acquire a certain inescapable resemblance to the only other married people most younger readers know well—their parents.

As Howell admits, kids are the primary audience for comic books. And few kids are acquainted with anyone who is married [or formerly married] except their own parents and relatives, their friends' parents, a few teachers whom nobody believes have any real life outside the classroom anyway, and other dull respectable people whom no self-respecting comics fan would want to grow up to be like.

Most comic book heroes forfeit a certain amount of appeal as reader-surrogates for young fans to begin with simply because, whether they act like it or not, they are clearly biological adults, and therefore closer in age to Mom and Dad then they are to the average kid reader [a problem which is particularly pronounced in the cases of heroes who played an inconveniently-well-established role in World War II]. DC's insistence that Superman remain eternally 29 [and therefore at least marginally within the ranks of those whom the youth of the 1960s considered young enough to trust], coupled with both major companies' similar, though less explicit, policy of prolonging the youth of those non-adult characters they do have beyond all reasonable suspension of disbelief [**e.g.** Robin's forty-year adolescence, Peter Parker's snail-like progress through high school and college, etc.], reveals a deep-seated conviction that any super-hero who develops more than the most glancing resemblance to everyday real-life adults like the readers' parents inevitably suffers in terms of reader identification. That this fear has some basis in fact can be clearly seen by the popularity The Teen Titans automatically tend to achieve whenever their book is revived, no matter how embarrassingly badly it is handled [see p. 26 of the Len Wein interview in the same issue of **COMICS FEATURE**]. The undeserved enthusiasm for this tiresome team among certain sectors of the comics-buying population is inexplicable except in terms of the increased accessibility as reader surrogates the teenage heroes possess purely by virtue of their age. This phenomenon is even more clearly the motivating force behind the hysterically favorable reaction of younger fans to the distinctly unimpressive new X-Man Kitty Pryde [Sprite], as the following line from a fan rave letter about her printed in **X-MEN #135** shows: "Just wanted to say thanks for giving us kids a chance to be somebody!"

If the mere fact that a super-hero is no longer a kid reduces young readers' ability to enjoy picturing themselves in his boots and cape, making him settle down into wedded domesticity with a member of the opposite sex would cut their capacity for identification still further by encumbering the character's exotic and adventurous super-heroic life with an unwelcome element of the acutal adult reality which most kids perceive as unappealingly humdrum. The logical next step of giving that super-hero and his spouse children of their own simply increases much further the young fan's alienated sensation that he is reading about how his parents might behave if they

had super-powers, not about how wonderfully free-wheeling fun he himself could have with those same super-powers.

This goes a long way toward explaining why, as Howell points out, so few super-heroes get married, especially if they are starring in their own books, and why even fewer of them have children once they are married. If we eliminate the now-adult offspring of older super-heroes who discreetly raised their families off in four-color limbo, such as Zatara [father of Zatanna], the Earth-Two Batman and Catwoman [parents of The Huntress], Miss America and The Whizzer [parents [?] of Quicksilver and The Scarlet Witch], and Spitfire [mother of the non-super-powered Kenneth Crichton-Falsworth, who appeared with her in the recent **CAPTAIN AMERICA #253-4),** the "real" children of super-heroes [as opposed to those who periodically appear in Imaginary Stories] can literally be counted on the fingers of one hand. They come to a grand total of five: Franklin Richards, son of Fantastic Four members Reed Richards and Sue Storm; Rebecca Langstrom, daughter of Kirk [Man-Bat] Langstrom and his wife Francine [the sometime She-Bat]; Arthur Curry, Jr. [Aquababy], the now-deceased son of Aquaman and Mera; Marcus, the lover/"son" of Ms. Marvel "born" in **THE AVENGERS #200,** whose status as a genuine super-hero offspring is distinctly dubious; and the child with which Crystal of The Inhumans, wife of Quicksilver, has been pregnant for the past two years.

NO, FRANKLIN, HONEY, NOT LIKE IN THE COMICS. THIS WAS REAL AND WE COULD HAVE BEEN HURT. YOU MUSTN'T CONFUSE REALITY WITH--
AW SHUCKS, MOMMY, I KNOW IT WAS REAL. ANYBODY WHO DOESN'T KNOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN REAL THINGS AND COMIC-BOOKS HAS TO BE GOOFY.
©1981 Marvel Comics Group

Sue Storm and Franklin: "...giving that super-hero and his spouse children of their own simply increases much further the young fan's alienated sensation that he is reading about how his parents might behave if they had super-powers..."

Needless to say, this state of affairs is hardly desirable. Young readers' reluctance to interest themselves in stories which prominently feature such real-life adult experiences as the development of long-term romantic relationships is indeed a formidable obstacle to the commercially successful portrayal of marriage and parenthood in comics. Nevertheless, it is both artistically and socially irresponsible for comics creators to throw up their hands in disgust and declare that overcoming this juvenile prejudice is a hopeless task. It is probably true that most children are inherently somewhat reluctant to contemplate, even through fictional scenarios, the prospect of growing up to be a **bona fide** adult [as opposed to the immature fascimiles of same epitomized by so many childishly-inconsiderate and unduly self-absorbed super-heroes], much less eventually making a lasting romantic commitment. But surely a writer who has any interest in how his work affects his readers should be concerned with combatting the Peter Pan attitude rather than reinforcing it. Obviously this is no mean feat, but to a creator with genuine artistic aspirations and a true love of the medium, the difficulty of the task would simply increase the fascination of the challenge.

Unfortunately, there are very few people currently working in mainstream comics who possess both the motivation and the artistic skills necessary to depict responsible adult behavior and relationships effectively enough to hold the interest of even readers unprejudiced against characters who act like grown-ups, much less command the attention of jaded juveniles who prefer flashy super-stunts and special effects to anything more thought-provoking. Steve Englehart may be able to inject enough vitality into Hawkman and Hawkgirl's marriage to rivet the reader to the page in anxiety over how Hawkgirl will handle a smitten super-villain's demand that she betray her husband or be killed with him in a particularly grotesque manner **(JLA #145,** August, 1977), but the average comics scripter can no more transcend the stereotypical extremes of portraying marriage as a) boring, or b) an occasion for endless petty bickering, than he can fly.

Adding to the difficulties of writing about marriage or its unofficial equivalent for an audience which tends to be particularly unreceptive to depictions of that institution is the fact that, despite Howell's claims to the contrary, there are virtually no successful precedents in comics or any other popular medium for the portrayal of marriage as anything but an unappealing union of man and appendage—when it is portrayed at all. **MY THREE SONS, FAMILY AFFAIR, THE BEVERLY HILLBILLIES, THE COURTSHIP OF EDDIE'S FATHER,** and **THE ANDY GRIFFITH SHOW** are but a few of the plethora of

...DOESN'T IT? I DO WISH YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO GO OFF JUST NOW, PETE...
CAN'T BE HELPED, HONEY. THIS IS NO TIME TO BE TURNING DOWN WORK!...
...I DON'T HAVE TO TELL YOU THE WAY THINGS ARE IN THE MAGAZINE BUSINESS...
I KNOW... IT'S JUST THAT WE'LL BE APART FOR OUR ANNIVERSARY AGAIN, AND... WELL— HAVE A GOOD TRIP...
LOOK ON YOUR DRESSING TABLE. HE LEFT A CONSOLATION PRESENT! SMELLS LIKE PERFUME!
REALLY? IT MUST BE THE ECONOMY GALLON SIZE! MY, MY... WHAT GOES ON IN MEN'S MINDS, DAISY...
©1981 Chicago Tribune-N.Y. News

"*ON STAGE* actually was such a paragon among "married" strips in every other respect that the occasional extended separations of Mary Perkins and...Pete Fletcher can be objected to only on the most technical of grounds."

long-running TV situation comedies which for years strenuously avoided that notorious source of boredom, married love, despite the fact that "family" [as in parent-child] situations were one of their main story sources. Equally significant in this regard are the more recent cases like **RHODA**, who was divorced from the long-sought man of her dreams after a mere one-and-a-half TV seasons of marriage, for no discernable reason other than the series' writers were having trouble coming up with plots for a show about a married couple, and **TRAPPER JOHN, M.D.,** whose split with his ex-wife, who occasionally turns up on the show despite the divorce, seems almost equally unmotivated.

Even the examples Howell cites are hardly the glowingly successful models of how to portray married life entertainingly that he suggests. For one thing, although the lead characters of the two newspaper strips Howell mentions, **STEVE CANYON** and **ON STAGE,** are unquestionably married, much of the time the strips don't actually portray married life at all, instead resorting to the old separate-the-spouses routine in order to make the protagonists functionally single again for long stretches of time. [This technique, by the way, is the all-time favorite of Dale Messick, creator and current writer of **BRENDA STARR,** one "married" strip which Howell refrains from mentioning—with good reason.] This worked quite credibly in **ON STAGE,** whose married leads are employed in the notoriously migratory professions of acting and journalism. Besides, **ON STAGE** actually was such a paragon among "married" strips in every other respect that the occasional extended separations of Mary Perkins and her husband Pete Fletcher can be objected to only on the most technical of grounds. However, **STEVE CANYON** is a different story. Before her rather awkward return to the strip last Spring, Summer Smith Olson Canyon had been missing for over three years, for reasons as inexplicable to the characters in the strip as they were to the readers. Furthermore, judging by the sequences of Steve and Summer together that I have seen since her return, Caniff has been handling the marriage aspect of the strip in a distinctly uninspired fashion, using Summer mostly as a rather clumsy device for exposition and/or misdirection of the reader.

As for the "TV shows like **MC MILLAN AND WIFE**" that Howell refers to, the only other commercially successful television program starring a husband-and-wife team that I can think of is the current **HART TO HART.** Despite its apparent popularity, this show could hardly be considered a great artistic success, since it relies heavily on exotic locations, **PEOPLE** magazine cliches about the personal lives of the rich and famous, and an endless succession of implausably-motivated villains who plan to assassinate one of the Harts, usually Jennifer [Stephanie Powers], in order to get at the other, or because they've mistaken her for someone else whom they have some equally half-baked motive for killing. **MC MILLAN AND WIFE** itself, of course, fell into the same old pitfall as its infinitely superior probable inspiration, the extremely witty **"Thin Man"** movies starring William Powell and Myrna Loy as husband-and-wife detectives Nick and Nora Charles. That is, the wife gets a fairly meaty role and a few good lines [a lot of good lines in Myrna Loy's case], but does very little of the actual detecting. In fact, she often winds up doing a number of conspicuously stupid things so she can get into a damsel in-distress situation and be rescued by her husband after an exciting chase scene or a big confrontation with the villain.

These recurring difficulties in presenting attractive husband-and-wife teams in which both parties are interesting, intelligent, and competent are probably partly due to the larger problems involved in giving any two co-stars truly equal billing. Although in recent films and TV shows, "buddy" situations featuring two male, or, more rarely, two female friends seems to be more popular and more successful in presen-

ting the two people involved as equal partners than male-female partnership situations, this is probably largely due to the fact that the same-sex nature of the team supposedly rules out any romantic involvement within the partnership. This makes it possible for each "teammate's" characterization to be fleshed out separately, if only in the most superficial way, by giving him his own ongoing or one-episode love interest [who functions as his own private one-person supporting cast, as in the TV detective series **STARSKY AND HUTCH** and **TENSPEED AND BROWN SHOE),** or, less frequently, showing how he differs from his partner by means of contrasting the two men's behavior toward the woman they both love [as in **BUTCH CASSIDY AND THE SUNDANCE KID**].

When the two co-stars are a male and a female who are already romantically involved, this easy method of giving them each equal time on stage or on panel by developing their personal lives along separate tracks is eliminated, since the partners are themselves each other's love interests. Worse yet, if the long-term nature of the romantic relationship between the two is one of the basic givens of the series from the start, the writer is deprived of the possibility of generating any suspense about whether or not the romance will stand the test of time and the various dramatic situations it is subjected to, as is possible when one of the two lovers is a mere supporting character, and therefore expendable.

The importance of the actual or potential separation of the partners' love lives and their working relationship to their characterization as equals can best be seen by examining the only two successful male-female teams that meet my admittedly exacting standards for equality within the partnership. There are Emma Peel and John Steed of **THE AVENGERS** and Modesty Blaise and Willie Garvin of the **MODESTY BLAISE** newspaper strip. [Please note that though in the latter case the very title of the strip suggests that Willie is merely

NO, WILLIE... THE ONLY SURE WAY OUT NOW IS ACROSS COUNTRY ON FOOT, AND YOU'RE STRONG ON THAT
THAT WAY ROUND? YOU COULD TAKE THE FILMS, AN'—
©1981 London Daily Mail

Willie Garvin and Modesty Blaise.

"...since Steed and Peel were not actually married and definitely did have their own separate lives...there was a certain amount of suspense..."

Modesty's sidekick and not her partner, he is **at least** as much her equal as Robin is Batman's or Bucky was Captain America's. Although both the Robin-Batman and Bucky-Captain America teams had a definite junior and senior partner [though even this distinction has eroded somewhat over time in the case of Batman and Robin], the "kid sidekick" was generally an integral part of the team, and not just a mascot whose main function was to tag along looking cute and continually being captured by the villain, as has so often been the case when the sidekick or supposed partner is female [**e.g.** the O'Neil/Adams Green Arrow and Black Canary]. Willie Garvin is a sidekick in the [slightly] junior partner sensense, not in the glorified mascot sense.]

As Peter Sanderson somewhat mystifiedly pointed out in an article in **COMICS FEATURE #3,** the Modesty Blaise/Willie Garvin relationship is unique among male/female teams in that writer Peter O'Donnell makes it quite clear that though the heroine and hero are close friends and business associates, they are not lovers. In fact, in a number of their adventures, either Modesty or Willie or both is/are shown to have a separate love interest drawn from outside the continuing Blaise/Garvin partnership. Perhaps the most notable recent instance on this is Willie's rather abortive relationship with the novice secret agent Maude in the recently-concluded run of **BLAISE** strips printed in **THE COMIC READER.**

THE AVENGERS is a slightly different story. As Patrick Macnee, who played Steed, pointed out in an interview, "We just assumed everyone knew that Steed and Mrs. Peel were sleeping together," and a viewer would have to be pretty dull not to figure out that there was something more than sibling camaraderie between them. However, the fact that this always remained unofficial and largely implied

rather than clearly established, and since Steed and Peel were not actually married and definitely did have their own separate lives [and even apartments], there was a certain amount of suspense about the possible consequences when one or the other of them flirted with someone else, especially when it wasn't in the line of duty. The viewer never really expected Steed and Emma to break up either romantically or professionally, but the possibility was more genuinely there as a continuing element than it could be in a series in which the hero and heroine were legally husband and wife.

It can hardly be essential to the success of a genuine male/female partnership of equals [as opposed to the more common situation of the male hero with a tagalong love interest who doubles as a second-rate super-heroine] that the hero and heroine be "just friends" or at most somewhat ambiguous in their romantic commitment to each other. The fact that it has usually turned out that way so far seems largely due to the difficulty most writers for the popular media have in constructing stories with more than one three-dimensional protagonist—a difficulty which causes them to use separate love lives as shorthand for the separate inner lives, motivations, etc., that they find so difficult to evoke more subtly when faced with the need to fit two equal co-stars into one plot or series. [Although the fact that Steed and Mrs. Peel do have autonomous existences independent of each other and of the team is established primarily by filling in a broader range of background details and occasional non-romantic supporting characters for each one, and only occasionally and incidentally by having them flirt with other people, they are the notable exception to this rule.]

JUST LIKE THAT — IN LONDON'S HEATHROW AIRPORT — STEVE GETS ORDERS TO HURRY TO THE MIDDLE EAST!
AND I DON'T EVEN GO HOME WIT' D' GUY WOT BRUNG ME!
BUT THE BIGGEST SURPRISE FOR SUMMER OCCURS WHEN THIS LUG HAILS HER AND SAYS...
LUSTY LILY! -IF I DIDN'T WE T'CATCH A 'OT BIRD...
...WE'D SHOW LONDON SOME FANNCY FIGURE WORK—RAHT, DICKY?
COULD WE HELP YOU, MA'AM?
IS THE FIRST PASSENGER FLIGHT TO THE MOON READY FOR BOARDING?
GAT
14-20
Travelers Aid
©1981 Chicago Tribune-N.Y. News

Summer Canyon: "a clumsy device for exposition and/or misdirection of the reader."

There is certainly nothing wrong with male-female teams who keep their romantic and professional lives separate—in fact, we will need a lot more of them to overcome the prejudices of those people who still believe that it is impossible for a man and a woman to work together without becoming sexually involved. However, the fact that writers tend to either stay away from or only partially succeed in portraying as protagonists male and female partners who are clearly committed to each other romantically as well as professionally inevitably subliminally suggests that such even-handed-in-every-way male/female partnerships are impossible. •

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PAUL DINI on: **GROWING UP WITH UNCLE SCROOGE**

BOB SORON on: **DETECTIVE COMICS IS DC COMICS**

CHUCK HUBER on: **THE SUPER-HERO AS VIGILANTE**

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does the New X-Men's foe, ARCADE, have in common with Hannah Arendt's EICHMANN IN JERUSALEM?

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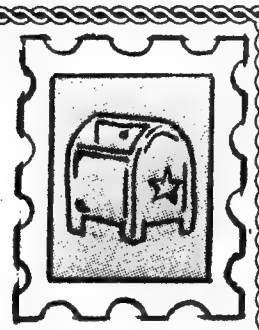
Carol Kalish is a graduate of Harvard University with a B.A. in Geology.



WHY WOMEN READ ARCHIE COMICS

by Carol Kalish

Last issue we left our intrepid heroine wrestling with two irate kitties for possession of the dismembered pieces of a Baron Karza toy. As we once again take up our epic tale of **"Why Women Don't Read Comics,"** we find that the kitties have emerged victorious from the struggle and have dragged Karza off to an unmerited [and unknown] end, leaving our heroine to find solace for her various injuries with a box of Archie Comics.

"Now wait just one minute," you shriek, losing all patience. "What do Archie Comics have to do with the question of why women don't read comics? It's bad enough we have to read stupid Baron Karza stories, but articles about Archie Comics are just **too** much."

Unfortunately for those readers who view the Archie Comics line as nothing more than mere relics of a better-off-forgotten teeny-bopperhood, the various titles which recount the adventures of the red-haired, freckle - faced wonder and his friends have an inordinate amount to do with women and their comic book tastes. For while the audience demographics of both Marvel and DC [the two main super-hero comics houses] admit to an overwhelming male bias, the Archie Comics line [which has nary a super-hero except in occasional reprint] consistently claims a very high percentage of female readers. [Interestingly enough the demographics also indicate that male interest in Archie comics is very much a matter of age. Almost 40% of Archie's younger readers [below 12 years old] are male. However, once past puberty, boys seem to lose interest in Archie's adventures and male readership declines to a little over 23%. The number of female readers, however, remains unchanged, indicating that female interest in the comics is unaffected by wrinkles, grey hair, and other signs of old age.] Given the audience demographics, it is obvious that Archie Comics must offer the potential female comic reader something that is not found in super-hero comics.

According to the various sources cited last issue, many women look for specific elements in the entertainment media they favor; elements not often emphasized in most mainstream comics. According to studies on perception, women respond far more favorably to visual arts which make heavy use of facial expressions and/or body language, as well as narrative and conversational highlighting of motivation and personality than to over-emphasized physical slug-fests and fast-paced action. Super-hero comics, dependent as they are on some manner of physically-expressed confrontation between good and evil, often alienate female readers who would otherwise be happy to immerse themselves in four-color fantasies. Archie comics, however, have eschewed violent confrontations [except on Riverdale High's football field or an occasional lover's tiff] in favor of characterization [albeit very strange and exaggerated characterization], plotlines centered on the bizarre motivations and personalities of the series' principal figures, and such social concerns as can be of immediate relevance to teen-age readers. Therefore, the indications are that the Archie comics would have a solid basis for a strong appeal to women readers.

SIGH! WHEN I WAS FIFTEEN, I BUILT A RAFT AND IT FLOATED!
SO?
LAST YEAR I BOUGHT AN EIGHTY FOOT YACHT!
BEAUTIFUL! THE LAST WORD IN LUXURY!
BUT WHAT'S THE POINT?
©1981 Archie Comics

Naturally enough, Mr. Lodge, Veronica's filthy rich father, goes on to comment on how he enjoyed his raft more than his yacht. "Money isn't everything" is a constant *leit-motif* throughout the Archie titles.

Before we continue our theoretical discussion, perhaps I should first familiarize any readers who come from Lower Slobbovia and who are therefore unaware of the Archie phenomenon. The company is one of the oldest extant comics publishers, having successfully weathered all of the various publishing catastrophes which downed so many other comics houses over the years. For almost forty years the company has been depending upon the marketing draw of a freckled, red-haired teen-ager named Archie Andrews. Archie's adventures—and those of a select coterie of his friends, relatives, teachers, and acquaintances—have long formed the backbone of the comics line. Archie's perambulations are presented in a cartoony style and that, coupled with the company's predilection for humorous storylines, has caused the Archie genre to become known as "Funny People" comics.

Although the Archie variety of comics definitely avoids the current modish "realistic" style of drawing **a la** Neal Adams [who, strangely enough, worked for the company when he was just starting out in comics], it still manages to capture—far more than do its super-hero kindred—an aura of realism, and create believable [though extreme] characterization, and provide illumination into problem-solving of far greater relevance to the perceptive reader than how to defeat an eight-armed evil super-genius. Unlike the product of Marvel and DC, the Archie line avoids big cities and Earth-shattering problems. Instead it focuses on the mundane aspects of ordinary middle-class life. None of the characters featured in the Archie books are ever involved in world-saving battles against deranged super-villains. No one is given great powers and hence great responsibility to meddle in other peoples' lives and affairs. Instead, Archie and his gang grapple with far more immediately-relevant problems—difficulties that are easily identified with by the series' readers. The readers are caught up in an already-familiar world in which the adventure of the moment is inspired by difficulties caused by dating, school, dating, part-time employment, dating, parents, dating, and ordinary life. [Did I mention dating?] The activities in an Archie comic mirror the ordinary activities of its targeted audience.

Although the plots and situations covered by the company seem boring, spice is added by the oft-times brilliant—though highly bizarre—characterization of the principal Archie figures: Archie himself, the well-meaning klutz; Veronica Lodge, spoiled, bitchy, and rich, rich, rich; Betty Cooper, the all-American girl; Reggie Mantle, in love with himself; and Jughead Jones, Archie's true pal—who is both a woman-hater and a foodaholic. By using easily identifiable, uncomplex plot springboards, the stories are free to focus on the **characters** involved in their eccentric "slice of life" comedies. Facial expressions are carefully delineated [often after being exaggerated to the point of parody]. A raised eyebrow or a sly grin can offer constant reinforcement to the personality-revealing dialogue constantly spouted by the leading players. For example, when Veronica Lodge reveals to the readers that **she** knows she's both beautiful and spoiled, her sweet, too-innocent-to-be-true, cat-licked-the-spilled-milk expression reinforces the readers' appreciation of the twin facts that she's what she is both because she's **expected** to be that way [because she's rich], but also that she **likes** being a

IN MY DAY I ONLY HAD TO COMPETE WITH THE MEN!
IS THAT WHY THEY CALLED THEM THE GOOD OLD DAYS?
HUMPH! WE DIDN'T CALL THEM THE GOOD OLD DAYS!
END

©1981 Archie Comics

The Archie line also wins praise from its female readers for its decidedly feminist approach. Although presented in a humorous light, the validity of the women's movement and the need for sexual equality still is emphasized. This positive reinforcement is a balm for many female readers.

spoiled brat. Such subtle character delineation is an invitation to the perceptive reader to examine the other characters in the hopes of uncovering similar traits. Indeed, given the studies on women's fascination with facial expression and their penchant for investigating others' characters through analysis of subtle "tics," the Archie comics line's emphasis on close-ups, "talking head" shots, and expressions almost guarantees that the product would attract a large female readership.

But Archie artists are not content with mere facial expressions. They extend their revealing character visuals to include body language. In no other line of comics does body language—the subtle expression of personality and motivation through posture and physical motion—figure so prominently. The reader is **assumed** to already be familiar with the implications of certain classic positions and movements, and is expected to apply that knowledge when a character falls into such a posture. When Betty or Veronica take up a stylish cheesecake pose **a la** Betty Gable, the artist and writer expect that the reader will read certain elements into the story, elements that will therefore not have to be introduced through dialogue or captions. When Veronica falls into a bored slouch during one of Betty's joyful monologues, the writer assumes that the reader will pick up on Veronica's state of mind through the visuals and continues the story from there.

But the entire Archie approach to comics storytelling would fail if the expressions and body language used to convey, supplement, or support characterization advanced through the narrative, weren't accurate reflections of reality. Although the expressions and postures might be exaggerated to the point of parody, it remains obvious to any interested reader that the Archie creators are committed people-watchers who translate their observations directly to the four-color page.

Most women are naturally attracted by the company's visual style. However, even more attractive to the female reader than the visual approach is the Archie line's emphasis on story lines which are based upon problem-solving of immediately-identifiable social dilemmas. To many Archie readers, especially women, such interpersonal concerns as love triangles (and proper resolution of same), dating protocol, and general rules for social interaction are of paramount importance and interest. The comics, in essence, provide the reader with a vicarious testing ground for various approaches to solving life's major and minor problems. If Betty Cooper decides that helping others is more important to her than going to "The Game" with Archie Andrews, then the reader gains the opportunity to evaluate that problem (to help or date?), see how the fictional—yet believable—character resolves the difficulty, test that solution against the reader's own set of moral and behavioral codes to determine if the indicated solution is personally applicable, and finally, integrate the suggested solution into his/her own behavioral system.

The various studies and advertising tenets discussed last issue indicate that women are far more interested in this type of socially-relevant storytelling than they are in violently-expressed conflicts, however ideologically instructive. While the Archie line might not offer the reader the same level of excitement and dynamic action available in a super-

Archie comics excel in the use of body language and facial expression. Often used in lieu of captions or dialogue, the visual elements expand the reader's understanding and appciation of the story.

©1981 Archie Comics

hero title, they do offer immediate and consistently-perceptive insight into the workings of social intercourse which the sproadically introduced and irresolutely developed "soap opera" sub-plots of the super-hero genre cannot equal. Given a choice between a comic which convincingly contrasts the advantages and disadvantages of being rich or middle class or one which allows the hero an opportunity to whine about his rotten financial condition, most women would opt for the former.

Women have definite interests when it comes to the visual arts, especially comics. Action is not enough, indeed it may be totally irrelevant for most female readers. Women seem to look for a visual evocation of social reality, one built up by the adroit use of the commonly observed behavioral "tics", body language, and facial expressions which form the basis for personality analysis. Additionally, women desire narrative elements and storylines which emphasis **people**, not **action**; storylines which offer insight into the workings of diverse personality types and the underpinnings of various key social activities. Archie comics, with their emphasis on a small group of characters [all of whom are derived from basic stereotypes] and their low-keyed plots based upon everyday life, are tailored to match these female interests. By doing so, they have won a sizable audience that remains relatively untapped by the other major comics companies.

Unfortunately, by catering so closely to female readers' interests, the Archie Comics line has failed to satisfy the male readers' desires for explosive action tinged with violence. Can this be an indication that it is impossible to produce a comic that can satisfy both male and female readers? Will the comics industry always be divided into "girl's comics" [a.k.a. "sissy comics"] and **comics**? We'll address these questions next issue. •

peter pan

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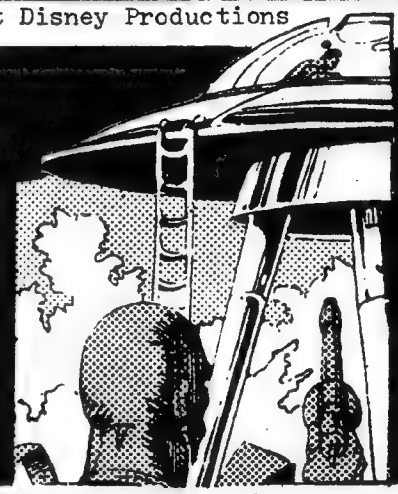

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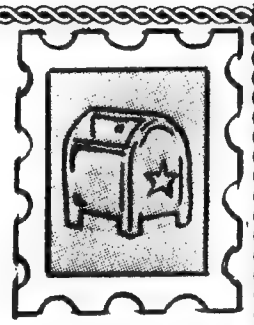
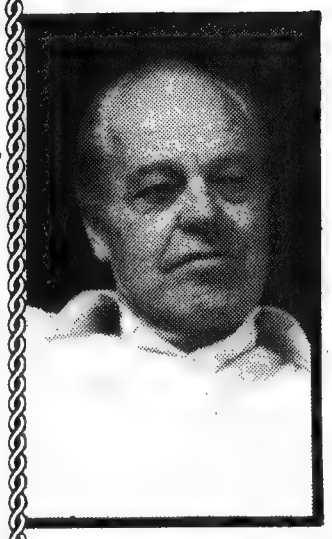
Paul Dini is a graduate of Emerson College and a former animation writer for Filmation.





A CONVERSATION WITH BILL DANCH

by Paul Dini

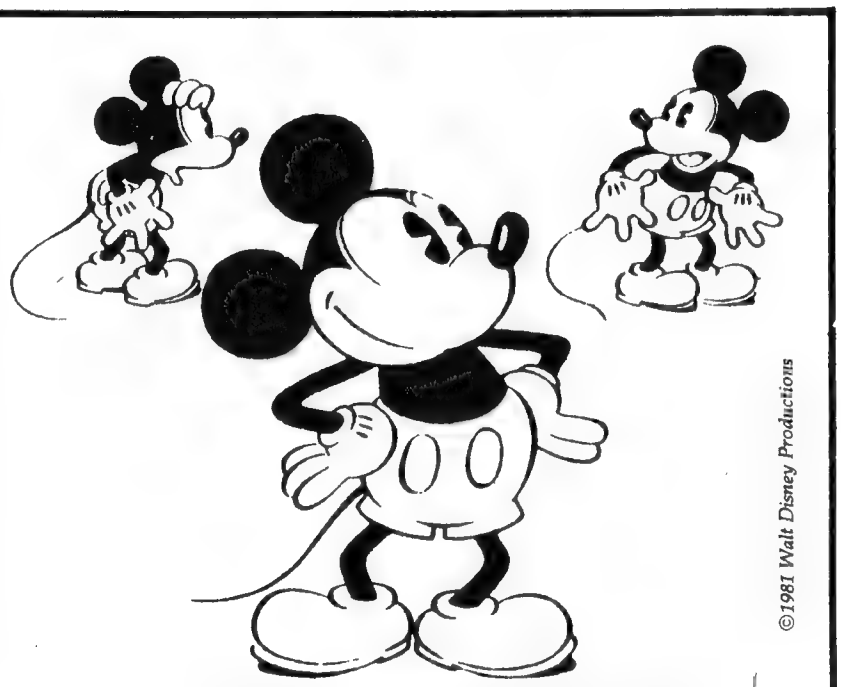
At age 70, Bill Danch is a seasoned, hard-bitten (also hard-biting) veteran of radio, television, and animation writing. In a thirty-nine-year career of being involved with virtually every facet of the entertainment industry, Mr. Danch has made numerous contributions, many uncredited, to the field of animation.

Raised in Hammond, Indiana, Danch forsook his Midwestern roots to come to Hollywood in 1941 to write THE EDGAR BERGEN SHOW. When radio began to dry up in the 1950s, Danch turned to animation, which he has been in and out of for the past thirty years. In that time, he has worked with such peg-board luminaries as Bob Clampett, Tex Avery, Walter Lanz, and John Hubley. Recently, Mr. Danch has been scripting for Filmation Studios, where he is now senior writer and the developer of such shows as the acclaimed FAT ALBERT AND THE COSBY KIDS.

LETTER OF COMMENT interviewed the outspoken Bill Danch in his office at Filmation this past September.

DANCH: Before we start, you've got to promise not to ask me about Chuck Jones.
LOC: Why?
DANCH: I have a few good Jones stories, but I don't think they're appropriate, right now. I hear he's not feeling so well.
LOC: That's too bad. Well, over the years, you've worked with most of the original Warner directors... Avery, Bob Clampett...
DANCH: I worked with Clampett on the **BEANY AND CECIL** cartoon series. Writing and storyboarding, mostly. Clampett was executive producer of the series for Mattel who sponsored it on ABC.
LOC: I ran into Bob at the San Diego con in August and he called you one of the best writers in cartoons and certainly the best to work on his show.
DANCH: [Smiles] He was a fun guy to work with. Zany, crazy as hell, but we turned out a good show.
LOC: Did Clampett actually direct any of the cartoons?
DANCH: No, but he had a very big hand in the overall production of the show. The other writers and I would be storyboarding a scene, and Clampett would walk in and draw something crazy into the story. In one episode, the characters were in Venice, and Bob drew in Cecil bumping his head on the Gina Low Low Bridgeda. He loved bad puns.
LOC: Ever work for the Fleischers?
DANCH: I never met Max, but I once wrote a book with Dave on animation, which he put his name on; another likeable extender of the truth. Dave actually was the first to develop rotoscoping as such, which he did with **BETTY BOOP** and the early **POPEYE**s.
LOC: With the revolving table?
DANCH: Yeah. He'd build a real set on a big revolving table, then photograph the characters as he moved the table, giving it a three-dimensional look. Dave also claimed that the live hands seen at the beginning of the Koko cartoons were his, which they may well have been, but really, I knew he couldn't draw worth a shit.
LOC: That's been said of Disney, too.
DANCH: Oh, yeah! His own artists tried for three months to teach him to draw Mickey Mouse. He never got it right.
LOC: What **about** Disney?
DANCH: I respected him as a businessman, but the respect stops there. I was offered the chance to work for him twice, at very good money, and both times I refused, his personality was such a turn-off. He was a bit of a tippler, Disney. Also, he had a bad habit of swearing around people who hated strong language. He liked to see them get upset.

LOC: Good old Uncle Walt.
DANCH: I had a lot of friends over at Disney's who were really quite scared of him. When he yelled, they jumped. Thirty stories straight up.
LOC: Well, the head of any studio commands a lot of respect...
DANCH: Yeah, but even fourteen years later, you can go over to Disney's, and you'll see the people running around speaking of Walt in hushed whispers, "Oh, well, **Walt** wouldn't have done it like that..." that's not reverence, it's fear.
LOC: Hmm... anybody in animation you respect?
DANCH: Oh, sure, there was John Hubley, a wonderfully talented man who died a few years back. He brought me in in '51 to work on UPA's **MAGOO** series.
LOC: Had you written animation prior to that?
DANCH: No, I was working in radio. I started out on the **EDGAR BERGEN SHOW** and wrote some of the battles between W.C. Fields and Charlie McCarthy. I remember one time, we were rehearsing a show, and Fields storms in waving a script we had given him. "Who wrote this?!?" he roared. Quietly, Bergen pointed toward the writers. Fields walked over to us, nice and calmly, smiled, then threw the script in the air so it fluttered around us like confetti. "You sons of bitches!" he said. Actually, he was a nice enough man in his own way. I was in the army around that time, and worked on a lot of the Armed Forces Radio broadcasts. I got to write for a lot of celebrities then. Fanny Brice, Gable, Groucho Marx, whom I got to know quite well.
LOC: What was before radio?
DANCH: Six years as a gag man for **ESQUIRE**. Back then (1935), the magazine was much more of a humor vehicle than it is now. I worked on staff writing up gags for cartoons and fillers. Originally, I had started out to be a cartoonist. I still say that's the best type of life if you can swing it, and you're good at it, strip cartooning. Anyway, I had gone through a few stints working for the syndicates, working mostly on the panel-type features, ones you probably don't know: **TOO LATE TO CLASSIFY, WHEN A FELLER NEEDS A FRIEND, SKETCHES**. That was an interesting feature, **SKETCHES**, because like Jimmy Hatlo's **THEY'LL DO IT EVERY TIME** we solicited ideas from the readers. The strip was a novelty because it was designed to be changed in whatever paper it ran, and the gag would always feature some local celebrity. Say the day's gag was about golfing. I'd draw this golfer trying to hit his ball out of the sand trap, and in the background there would be these two duffers saying, "There's blank, he's the best golfer in the club." And when they got the cartoon, each local editor would insert the name of the town golf nut where it said blank. It was a very popular feature, because everybody wanted to see their name in the comics. Finally we had to cancel it because we were swamped by submissions!
LOC: What was your involvement with the early UPA studio?
DANCH: Well, John Hubley brought me in, and they had been going about a year, I guess. This was in 1951, and radio was beginning to dry up. Television was just getting started, and there wasn't much work there, so Hubley suggested theatrical cartoons, which were still going strong. UPA was started by a group of artists spearheaded by Steve Bosustow who grown disenchanted working for Disney and formed their own studio.
LOC: Like what Don Bluth and his associates did last year.
DANCH: Pretty much. Only whereas Don seems to be using the techniques of Disney's full animation in happier surroundings, Bosustow's and Hubley's break was a complete rebellion against the Disney style altogether. Hubley simplified animation, the general design and motion, and brought it down to a very simple level, but one that still served as a strong way to tell a gag or a story. A bit like a scratchy **NEW YORKER** cartoon brought to life. Up until that time, the established way a character moved, MGM's, Warner's, everybody's, was based on how a Disney character moved. Hubley simplified the action in his pictures, but never so much that the story or a joke would be hurt by short-cuts in animation.
LOC: And looking at the old **MAGOO** cartoons, it's impossible to imagine them in any style other than Hubley's limited design.
DANCH: There were a lot of good people over at UPA then. Bobe Cannon, Jules Angle, who is teaching art now, I understand—he's a terrific background artist—Tedd Pierce, a story man who invented such cartoon devices as wipes and zip-offs. Before that time, if a character had to go off-screen, he walked or ran off. When Tedd wrote a scene the character shot off the screen instantly. Saved money and looked good, too.
LOC: What part did you take in the creation of Magoo?



Danch refused twice to work with Walt Disney.

DANCH: Well, the basic character was already there when I got to UPA, but the other writers and I all threw in little bits to define his personality as we worked on a story. One thing we put in as an inside joke was that Magoo is an old Rutgers man. Now Rutgers graduates were known at one time to be notorious bigots, so it was kind of a double pun on shortsightedness. Magoo, who couldn't see well in the literal sense, and an old Rutgers man, who couldn't see straight at all.

LOC: That's funny. In **KRAMER VS. KRAMER** there's a brief segment of Dustin Hoffman's son watching a cartoon where Magoo is trying to get someone to sing the Rutgers' Fight Song with him.

DANCH: Really? I guess that's one of mine. [Laughs] As long as we're talking about admirable people in cartoons, I do want to mention Bill Melendez. He's a good friend and a very talented artist.

LOC: You'll excuse me for saying that's not always too apparent on the **PEANUTS** specials he does.

DANCH: Well, you figure that he's taking someone else's characters and transplanting them into a much more complex medium. It's difficult to retain the essentially flat style of Schultz's drawings and make it look interesting on the screen.

LOC: I once saw a short film he did called **THE RAINBOW BEAR** where he colored on each frame of the film by hand and mixed it together with a jazz soundtrack. It looked beautiful.

DANCH: He'll do that. Keeps him awake between Snoopys.

LOC: You've worked for Filmation for close to twelve years now.

DANCH: [Rolls his eyes] Gawd! [Laughs] Yeah. I came in to write a special, **ARCHIE AND SABRINA GO TO HIGH SCHOOL**, or something, and have been here ever since.

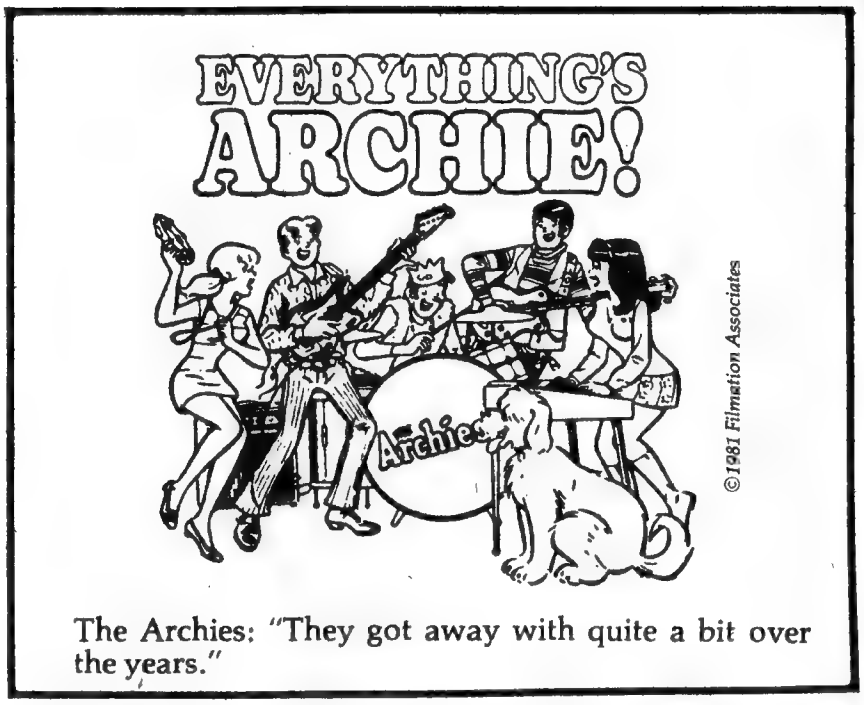
LOC: The **ARCHIE** series really helped make Filmation a force on Saturday morning. Did you enjoy the series?

DANCH: Can't say I did, even though I wrote a pile of them. Archie always showed a very idyllic, one-sided view of teen-age life. No kid ever drove around in an old jalopy and hung out at the malt shop. They were all behind the barn passing a joint around. Hell, I was raising my own marijuana plants in Hammond when I was fifteen. This was back in 1925 when it was legal. I tried it once or twice, but it didn't do anything for me.

Actually, the best reason most guys had for picking up **ARCHIE** comics wasn't for the wacky adventures of Reggie and Jughead, but for whatever cheesecake they threw in by way of Betty and Veronica. They got away with quite a bit over the years. We had to flatten them out when we put them on TV, the same with Sabrina when she came along.

LOC: What's the rationale for putting a magical character or robot or talking animal into an already popular series?

DANCH: [Gestures vaguely] Who knows? The powers that be figure a new novelty character will be an asset to an existing show. Look at Hanna-Barbera:



The Archies: "They got away with quite a bit over the years."

They do us one better by sticking a character like that into every new series. Nearly every series they do has three or four kids and a [take your pick] genie, shmoo, stupid dog... **SCOOBY DOO**, by the way, was lifted right from the Archies. The character names and designs are changed, but it is still essentially four teen-agers and a funny dog.

Actually, putting Sabrina in the Archies wasn't a bad idea. She went on to have her own show and she's still one of the studio's more popular characters next to Fat Albert.

LOC: Which everyone likes.

DANCH: They really do. The show's going into its eighth season now, and we're always getting favorable letters from parents and educators as well as from a whole new audience of kids who are just discovering the characters.

LOC: Who's their favorite?

DANCH: Well, they like Fat Albert, and Rudy, because he's the nasty one. A lot of the younger kids like Russell, Bill's little brother, because he can talk back to the others and not get punched.

A lot of the credit for the show's success has to go to Lou Scheimer and Norm Prescott [Filmation's executive producers] and Alan "Duke" Ducovny at CBS who really fought for the show. There was a **FAT ALBERT** special in 1969 which Filmation did not do, then another a year later which we did produce. Lou saw potential in it for a series and took it to NBC where it was turned down flat. Then he and Duke pitched it to Fred Silverman who was then the head of children's programming at CBS. Silverman wasn't wild about the show, but saw a chance to pick up some brownie points for running a pro-social series. Well, Fat Albert went on and received a terrific response, partially because of the novelty of being the first cartoon show with all black characters, but mostly because of its emphasis on problems common to all kids, and Cosby himself, who is a big draw for adults.

LOC: What is Cosby's actual involvement with the series?

DANCH: Bill co-owns all the Fat Albert characters

Flash Gordon and Gremlin: "I *hate* science fiction...I've had to write so goddam much of it."

with the studio and appears live in each show as narrator. He's also the voice of Fat Albert, Bill, Mushmouth, Mudfoot, and the Brown Hornet.

LOC: Has Bill Cosby ever written any of the episodes or suggested plots for stories?

DANCH: A few times, but nearly all the actual stories were scripted by Jim Ryan and myself. Jim left two years ago, and I've been doing the scripts with other writers. Cosby suggested one story that we did where the kids went to camp and met white kids for the first time. Bill outlined the plot on that one and Jim and I wrote it. It was a popular episode, too. Another innovation Cosby put in was the **"Brown Hornet,"** which was originally part of his comedy act. We refined the character as a goofy superhero, whose actions help the Cosby kids find the answer to whatever problem confronts them.

LOC: Do you enjoy reading or writing science fiction?

DANCH: [Crosses his arms and glares] I **hate** science fiction.

LOC: You'd think that working in a place like this...

DANCH: [Interrupting] That's why I hate it, actually. I've had to write so goddam much of it. We did **STAR TREK** a few years ago and I worked on that. [Makes face] D.C. Fontana was story editor and had an office right down the hall. Just this past season, we did **FLASH GORDON**, which I did not work on, but I'd get calls from these strange people, fans, I guess, who'd have me on the phone for twenty minutes screaming how wonderful they thought the show was. It's nice to know your work is appreciated, but **Jesus!**

I'll tell you, what was really scary was when Joanna Cameron was here doing **ISIS**. We'd get literally hundreds of letters from horny guys demanding to meet her. One basket case sent a letter a week containing pieces of his own excrement because he wanted her to have a little bit of him wherever she went. We never forwarded those letters, but I don't think she would have minded.

Back to science fiction; Harlan Ellison worked here a while on some project Lou was interested in doing. Lou had an idea of doing **THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN** in space as a feature and asked Ellison to do a treatment for him. Well, what he finally handed in was this gigantic major opus which would have been impossible to produce live or in animation or any other way you can name. It had something to do with New York being destroyed, and people changing into snakes, and reality collapsing; this is all on page one, by the way, so we put that one aside.

LOC: What's your over-all view of Saturday morning TV?

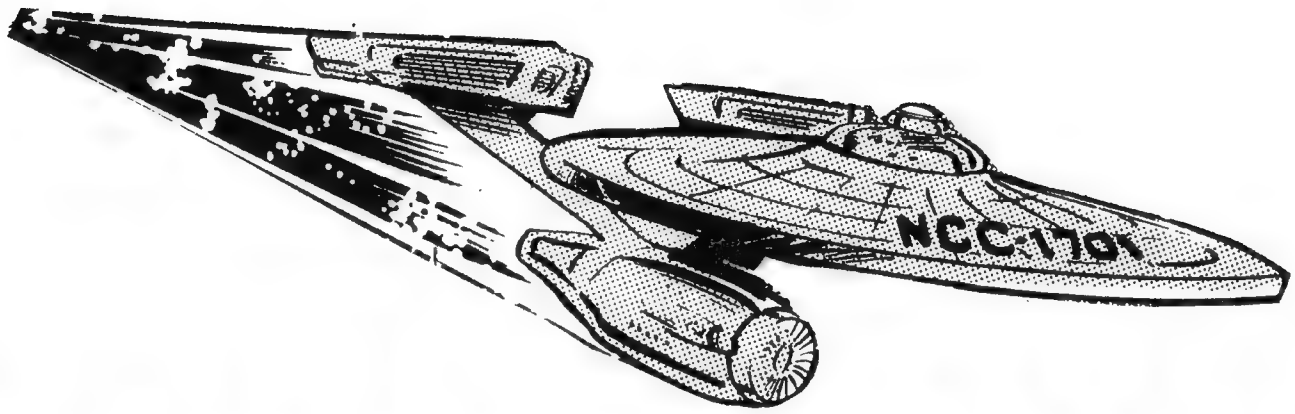
DANCH: Pretty dismal, really. I'm very proud of my involvement with **FAT ALBERT**, because I feel it is an important show and does do some good. Filmation, which started out as the weak sister in animation ten years ago, has worked toward upgrading the tone of Saturday morning here and there. Many times a show will have a little moral or lesson not only for the kids, but for the adults, too.

Everything else, the Hanna-Barbera comedy/mystery shows and long underwear heroes... [contemptuous snort]... I wrote Spider-Man cartoons for two years with Jerry Geronimi and Ray Patterson. Super-heroes don't do a thing for me. Stan Lee used to sit in on the story meetings. He was the meekest, most unprepossessing person you could ever want to meet. He's changed.

Hanna-Barbera... I was called in about twenty years ago to work on this idea Joe Barbera had. He wanted an animated family sit-com, but he couldn't figure out how he wanted to present it. So we had meetings, and I wrote presentations on the characters as Romans, as contemporary urbanites, Pilgrims, and every time, Joe would look at it and say, "Oh, we're close, Bill. We're real close! What else have you got?" Finally, I got fed up and walked out. As I was going, Joe said "What about the family show?" And I shouted back over my shoulder, "Set the whole damn thing in the Stone Age, for all I care!" Six months later, I turn on the TV and there's **THE FLINTSTONES**.

LOC: What a shocking coincidence!

DANCH: [Laughs] That's what they said. •



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James Van Hise is best known in fandom as the editor of *RBCC, ENTERPRISE INCIDENTS,* and *FANTASTIC EXPLOITS.*

Alternative Thoughts:

JOHN BYRNE, ARE YOU LISTENING?

by James Van Hise

John Byrne's recent announcement of his taking over **THE FANTASTIC FOUR** in lieu of **THE X-MEN** was met with a lot of surprise and consternation by fans. Part of this was because Byrne had been correctly quoted previously as saying that he planned to stay with **THE X-MEN** so that he could break the record previously set by Kirby of 102 consecutive issues of one comic (set, not so coincidentally, with the FF). So although Byrne had done a couple issues of **FF** already, there had been no indication that he had planned to jump ship, as it were, and take Terry Austin with him. And yet, it's not a complete surprise. Byrne had also expressed a lot of admiration for the Lee/Kirby days of the **FF** and had even done an homage to them in **MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE #50.** The seeds were there. Byrne's issues of the **FF** didn't exactly set anyone on fire because Sinnott's inking made them look suspiciously like John Buscema issues. If anything, they were met with a collective yawn. Can anyone even remember the plots of any of them? They weren't that distinctive. Maybe that will be different now.

What we should hope for is that Byrne's enthusiasm for this title will charge it with new vigor, because the FF have been pretty flaccid for about a decade. There are no surprises any more. When the FF break up the fans go, "What—again?" When one or more of them lose their powers there is no suspense because we know it won't last long. The FF have become set into a pattern wherein nothing changes. Writers have tried to change this by having more and more issues with battles on a cosmic scale, but this has just made things worse. Those cosmic battles have become the worst cliche of all because they are so far removed from anything identifiable with reality that they are dull, especially since the FF are invariably relegated to a back seat position wherein they watch it and may twitch at the right moment with a key line of dialogue. This was interesting the first time, back in **FF #48-50,** but it has been worn pretty thin since then and has even gotten to the point at which the repetition in these plots has become undisguised.

Look, fellows—Galactus just isn't interesting any more. How many times can we expect him to show up and then leave grumbling about the "next time" and rubbish like that? Just once I'd like to see him approached about attacking Earth again and have him say, "Earth? Earth! The last time I was there it took me a week to scrape it off my shoe! Earth! Forget it, I've got better things to do with my time than stage reruns!"

This may just reinforce the wonder that Byrne wants to bother with the **FF** at all. That's because you're not seeing the **FF** the same way he does, or the way a lot of people who still buy it to read and shake their heads over where it's gone. When I look at the **FF** today, I don't see an issue with a trite story about brain parasites which is just another pointless invasion story, but rather I see a whole heritage which goes back to 1961 and a magic which was established by Lee & Kirby. When I look at the **FF,** I don't see what's there, so much as I see the layers underneath where the glitter used to be, and I wonder if maybe this time a little of it might not peek through.

I've been reading the **FF** since #13, although the first issue I saw on the stands was #7. (It's that usual story. My parents wouldn't buy it for me, but I still remember the store in the mountains of Western New York state where I saw it when I was on vacation. In fact, that's the **only** thing I remember

from that vacation way back in 1962. That's how much of an impression it made on me sitting there on the comics rack. It was just so **different** looking from any other book on the stands.] That's another thing about those early **FF**s. The distinctive covers. But then they were trying harder to be noticed then.

It has been said that the Golden Age of science fiction [or comics] is twelve, and that if you go back years later and reread what thrilled you as a child

THUS, I'M SURE YOU'LL AGREE WITH ME THAT IT WOULD ONLY BE PRUDENT TO ELIMINATE YOU AND YOUR CONFEDERATES FIRST...
IF THERE'S GONNA BE ANY ELIMINATIN' DONE, YA CARTOON-SHOW CREEP--
©1981 Marvel Comics Group

Byrne's previous *FANTASTIC FOUR*s "didn't exactly set anyone on fire."

that you'll either find disappointment or a haze of nostalgia that will sabotage any attempt at critical acumen. Maybe that's true a lot of times, but it isn't true with those early **FF**s, the first forty especially and a number thereafter. There is a real verve and drive in those books—a make-or-break attempt at imagination and experimentation where the only good idea is a new idea. When an old villain was brought back it had to be with a new twist and an unusual flourish, not just the same old stuff. These comics were still fighting for their existence in the marketplace and they had to grab the reader by doing something arresting and interesting.

No, the FF as a concept and a comic is not overrated, in spite of what it's like right now. Before it settled into a dull groove there was a lot more **genuine** character interaction rather than the virtually interchangeable personalities they wear today.

In **BAH, HEMBECK!** Fred accurately picks **FF #9** as very representational of what the **FF** was really like back then. In the space of one issue the FF go bankrupt, almost break up, battle The Sub-Mariner, make a movie, and solve their financial woes. One issue! And it's not crowded. This was in the days before Marvel decided that their comics had to be almost ridiculously verbose with characters giving long-winded speeches and unnecessary captions describing the obvious. A fast-paced story in those days was brisk and concisely-told and yet seemed to give the reader a lot more in 22 pages than one seems to get today.

To give you an idea of the freshness of those early issues, the Thing was still a character who brooded a lot and who seemed not just a little dangerous [although by no means the homicidal maniac that Wolverine is consciously portrayed as being these days]. In **#**9, when Reed Richards is discussing ways to raise money and dismisses crime as, of course, unthinkable, The Thing responds by saying, "Oh **yeah??** Well, **I** might give it a thought!" and the reader knew that he was serious and that anything might happen because the Thing was unpredictable then. Now he's just an orange clown whose personality is submerged beneath wise-cracks.

So what can still be done with the FF? If Byrne is as enamored of those early issues as I think, he may just go back to them, reread them and submerge himself in the atmosphere they achieved, and then try and duplicate it.

Can the clock be turned back like that? Of course. Returning to that approach has nothing to do with violating continuity, just re-examining the way a subject is being treated. Does the current FF react and respond the way the old FF did? How was drama handled differently then than it is now? What made the characters more distinctive?

"WHAT A STRANGE COMIC BOOK. AFTER A MOMENT'S HESITATION, I SHOOK MY HEAD AFFIRMATIVELY, FIGURING WHAT HAVE I GOT TO LOSE?"
"NOTHING TO LOSE, AND EVERYTHING TO GAIN, FOR AFTER TEN MONTHS OF BUYING ONLY DC SUPERHERO COMICS, THE MARVEL AGE OF COMICS BEGAN FOR ME THAT CHILLY MARCH DAY IN 1962 WHEN MY MOTHER PURCHASED THAT COPY OF FANTASTIC FOUR #4."

One fan's initiation to the *FANTASTIC FOUR*, from *BAH, HEMBECK!*

Another thing in the favor of returning to the FF of seventeen years ago is Jim Shooter's wise decision to return to the single-issue story as the rule rather than the exception, and only allow the exceptional story that deserves to be continued. This may be an

economic decision more than a creative one [comics today have notoriously bad distribution and fans can easily miss an issue, thus destroying the value of a continued story. This is another reason that the non-returnable comics shop business has become so important, because 7-11s and the like just don't care about comics any more], but it's still a sound idea. Now writers have to plot more tightly, rather than with a lot of detours, and those early issues of **FF** are a good place to learn how to do it and do it well.

Stan Lee and Jack Kirby have fallen into disfavor in many fan circles in the past few years, but this is because of recent events and artistic trends that were poor decisions rather than revisions of historical perspective. Stan Lee has primarily become a P.R. man for Marvel and has rewritten comics history by claiming credits which are not entirely his. His **HISTORY OF MARVEL COMICS** in which he does not include Steve Ditko as an important part of the creation of Spider-Man is one example; and Kirby's post-Marvel revelations of his co-creating many characters which he drew is another.

Kirby, on the other hand, has had his respect diminished due to books he created [like **DEVIL DINOSAUR**, which, in my opinion, clearly never should have seen the light of day]—as well as his writing, which needed an editor's outside influence and perspective.

But all this is a very recent and small part of comics history and cannot and **should** not diminish what these undeniably talented people did earlier in their careers. It may surprise you to go back to those early **FF**s and see that, yes, Stan Lee used to write well and un-self-consciously **before** he became a self-created media personality who was harmless but still embarrassing to the very fans who respected his credits.

That John Byrne should find the lure of being the new creative force behind "The World's Greatest Comic Magazine" one he would give up **THE X-MEN** for is not as curious as some may imagine. Byrne had reached a point in his career at which he had begun writing as well as drawing and wanted to be more than just "the artist" on **THE X-MEN.** He demanded script approval from Chris Claremont and Claremont, understandably, refused. Jim Shooter is Chris Claremont's editor, not John Byrne. There is also the minor point that no other artist at Marvel has this kind of script approval of another writer's work. Dealing with one editor who has final say can be difficult enough without having two editors to constantly deal with. That John Byrne was an important element in the success of the New X-Men is undeniable, and how good the comic is from now on will demonstrate just how important his link in the creative chain was.

So now we're back at **THE FANTASTIC FOUR,** with Byrne and Austin at the helm and creative possibilities within reach which have not emerged in

I WARNED YOU, BEN!
I CAN STILL HANDLE A BIG APE LIKE YOU --ANYWHERE-- AND ANY TIME!
AND I'LL FIND A WAY TO SMASH DOOM, ALSO --ONE ROTTEN SETBACK ISN'T THE WHOLE WAR!!
LEGGO, YA BLASTED HUMAN OCTOPUS!! THAT'S MY PIZZA-EATIN' ARM!!
Y'KNOW SOMETHIN', SUSIE? THAT BOG-HEADED HUSBAND OF YOURS MAY BE THE CHAMPION CORNBALL OF ALL TIME--AND AS SQUARE AS A KIDDIE'S BUILDIN' BLOCK--
BUT, I BIGGER HE'S THE MOST MAN I EVER MET UP WITH, LADY! AND ONCE HE GETS DOONE FIGGERIN' IT'S ALWAYS HIS FAULT WHEN THE F.F. TAKES A NOSEDIVE. HE'LL FIND US SOME WAY TO CLOBBER DOOM--IF THERE IS ANY WAY--!
THAT'S JUST IT, BEN! WHAT IF THERE IS NO WAY?
HOW CAN ANY INDIVIDUAL--OR EVEN ANY SUPER-TEAM, LIKE OURSELVES, STAND UP TO A MAN WHO HAS THE POWER OF COSMIC ENERGY AT HIS COMMAND??
I--WUZ KINDA HOPIN'--YA WOULDN'T ASK THAT!
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"It may surprise you to go back to those early *FF*s and see that, yes, Stan Lee used to write well..." but only if you've forgotten issues like these completely. *(FANTASTIC FOUR #59)*

the comic since before Kirby left it ten years ago. The **FF** comic needs the freshness that Byrne could return to its pages. It needs the energy which thrived in the comic in the early and mid-1960s when the characters were being explored and the creative limitations of the book were still boundless. Personality was the keynote in those days. The Thing may have cracked wise just as much as he does now, but there were still moments of introspection when the facade was lifted and the pain endemic to his deformity was revealed. Perhaps it can be successfully argued that The Thing has accepted his grotesque state, but has he really? Can he? Could anyone looking like that forever in a society which boosts youth and loveliness even above talent and ability? There must still be moments when cruelties manifest themselves in startled looks on surprised people or the quick retreat usually reserved for confrontations with the retarded and the hopelessly deformed. Society does not reward the imperfect, except possibly in the cases of those who have been popularly accepted. Even this has story possibilities, such as having The Thing see the movie **THE ELEPHANT MAN** and draw uncomfortable parallels to himself; a freak who is the darling of society because he's a freak with a brain. A perhaps-unnerving concept for comics, but the **FF** comic needs something to shake it out of its staid storylines. Did the 1970s produce anything in the **FF** comic worth noting? Let's not drop the ball in the 1980s. The mag is twenty years old now—it's about time it reached maturity. •

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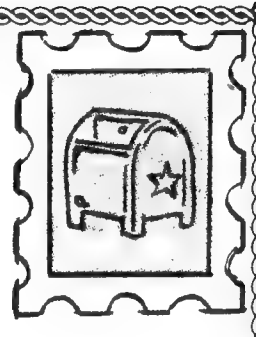
S. J. Haskins resides in Philadelphia and is a particular fan of the original X-Men.



I REMEMBER FRIDAY FOSTER

AND THE BLACK HEROINES OF COMICS

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by S. J. Haskins

She was tall, cinnamon, and velvety sophisticated. She was virginal. She was intelligent, obsequious, and politically innocent. She was poised and sweet; her name was Friday Foster, late of the ghetto, and comicdom's definitve "beautiful" Black girl. The diaphanous product of American writer Jim Lawrenrence and Spanish artist Jorge Longaron, her birth at the nadir of the "Black Revolution" anticipated the relentlessly castrating supermama a la Pam Grier or Tamara Dobson popularized in films. [Interestingly, Ms. Grier did play an aggressive misanthrope in a later film, **FRIDAY- FOSTER**.] Born January 18, 1970, Friday pursued the good life via her globe-trotting career in photography, to ultimately retire her cameras without ceremony in 1974.

Black imagery has been a subcutaneous element in American comics art since the 1890s, when the first black character in American comics appeared in a Richard Outcault 1896 **NEW YORK WORLD** cartoon, **THE YELLOW KID**. By the 1900s, black "characterizations"—unkempt, androgynous children, primordial, flaccid males; and obese, servile females—loyally orbitted the dominant icon. With unleavened regularity, Blacks, but for a few exceptions [for example Will Eisner's Ebony White, or Simon & Kirby's superbly primitive Whitewash Jones], led peripheral, amorphous lives. Heroes of color did not emerge before the 1960s: bugler Gabriel Jones was introduced rather surreptitiously into the Howling Commandos in 1963; the delectably scriptual T'Challa [The Black Panther] integrated the ranks of the super-endowed in 1966 [in **THE FANTASTIC FOUR #52].**

That the comics universe—comic strips, comic books, cartoons, and animation—is subject to and often defined by racism has never been denied. "Ebony was an attempt to introduce a Negro boy in a meaningful role," says Eisner. "No one ever showed Negroes in comics with any emotions other than weeping over the death of poor little Mandy, the little white girl." But the trouble with Ebony is that he **never** grows up, and in remaining prepubescent is ultimately biologically and emotionally impotent. And the Whitewash characterization incorporated every implacable negativism permitted.

But that was all in the 1940s. In a recent interview for **COMICS FEATURE** magazine [**#6**, October, 1980], editor Len Wein pointed out economic considerations when introducing a black hero into the **TEEN TITANS** comic: "...they [DC] were afraid that if we put a black character into the book, we wouldn't sell any copies in the South." Although Wein benignly ascribes company policy to an ambivalent age ["This was back in 1968 still..."], by **LOIS LANE #106** [November 1970], DC had managed to conjure up a most delightfully patronizing script: in **"I Am Curious [Black]"**, Lois, afro-ed and dashiki-ed, became black for a day.

To get the story of her life, the pugnacious Miss Lane descended upon Metropolis' Black community, "Little Africa," and was promptly miffed. No one would talk to her. At the very sight of her tenement dwellers slammed their doors. School children turned their backs. Mothers snatched away their babies. She was harangued by street corner militants. She couldn't even get a cup of coffee. Upon her return after her metamorphosis, however, the dusty color of her skin was the ticket to mephitic inner places, and in the story's final gesture towards brotherhood, a conscionable Miss Lane gave blood to a young black acquaintance. The racism inherent in the story was all the more insidious because it was wrapped in swaddling clothes. We could applaud Miss Lane's work, become enraged at her rejection, glimpse the narcotic poverty and quickly turn away. But in our

FLAP
FLAP
FLAP
THE FIRE COULD HAVE STARTED... FROM THIS PILE OF...TRASH!
YOU ALL RIGHT, HONEY? THIS PLACE IS A FIRETRAP! FROM THE STUFF PEOPLE LEAVE HERE!
BECAUSE OUR SLUMLORD CLAIMS HE CAN'T AFFORD A JANITOR ANY MORE TO TAKE AWAY THE GARBAGE!
©1981 DC Comics

Lois Lane in Little Africa: "...the dusty color of her skin was the ticket to mephitic inner places."

turning away, we missed the point: Why does "Little Africa" exist in such malodorous isolation? Admittedly, the comic book writer's principal concern is the dynamics of the medium itself. Given those limitations, I did not anticipate the studied emotionalism of a John Howard Griffin **BLACK LIKE ME** or a Grace Halsell **SOUL SISTER.** Racial prejudice is a delicate subject in any medium, but I did want more than a script which would be content with a reinstatement of the omnipresent classic stereotypes. In fact the book invents a few new ones: the uncooperative Negro. No living black soul has ever refused to talk to the press. Ever.

Friday Foster, of course, has not the psychological perogative of ersatz blackness, nor was she the

— AND HE FIGURED I'D BE AN EASY MARK FOR A GOOD-LOOKING SOUL BROTHER LIKE YOU?
FRIDAY, I... OH, ALL RIGHT! MAYBE MY COLOR DID HAVE SOMETHING TO DO WITH IT, BUT —
©1981 Chicago Tribune-N.Y. News

"traditional" super-hero, having neither cosmic origins nor paranormal, cataclysmic powers. Rather, her cool, plastic beauty, gothic sexuality, and gossamer polemics sensitized abhorrent comic images of black women. Yet Lawrence and Longaron, in their quest to invent a credible black female persona, attempted too much—for alas, poor Friday had no soul; she seemed to have escaped into the shining spheres without paying her dues, a luxury endemic to most ghetto women. Her seraphic perceptions were the metals for celestial chitins, not the tattered frocks of Earth. Friday simply was not Black enough. And I remember that it was a melacholy loss that she was not. There was quiescence, romance enough, and a cottony liberalism in the Foster scripts, but the strutting cynicism, earthy funk, and personal rage indigenous to black ghetto life was somehow denied.

In opposition to Friday's mystique was the ophidian wisdom of the nefarious Deadly Nightshade.

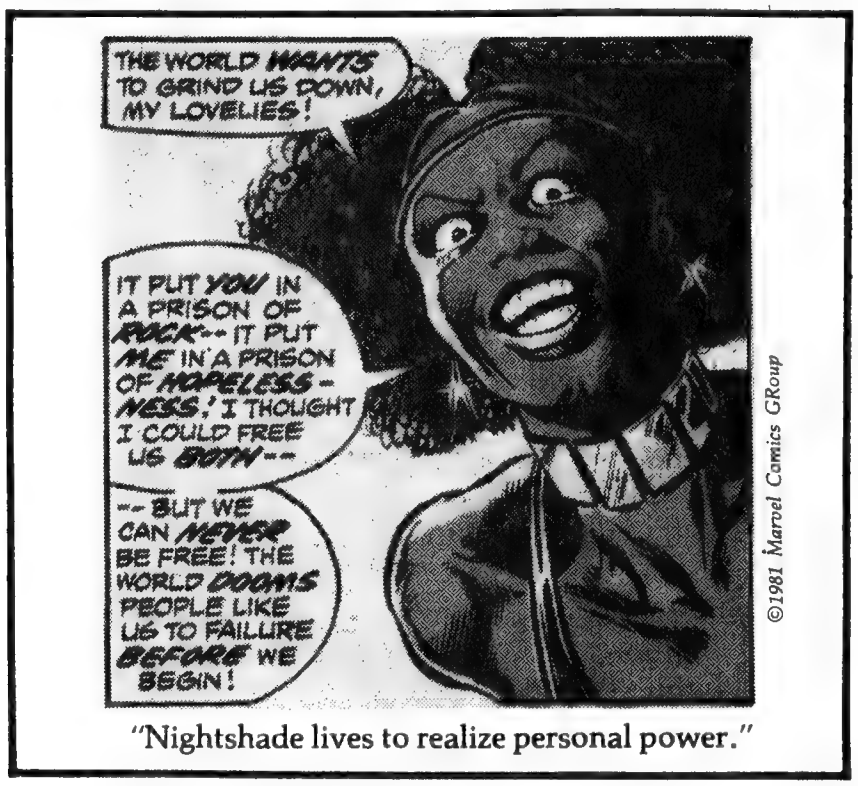
A mean, sullenly elegant, brilliant megalomaniac, Nightshade lives to realize personal power, but her creators [in search of a viable female character that happens to be black] I think misread the culture from which the character has supposedly sprung **(POWER MAN #53).** Born into spiritual and economic degradation, Nightshade grew up wild in the streets [black characters do a lot of that], and for all her sensuous madness, her paralyzing antivivification is to me ill-conceived. That is not to say that Marvel has erred in developing strongly motivated or criminal black women [Lord knows they exist], but black culturalization, for ghetto black women, has been and continues to be, communal. And although the ironies of modern existence may create any variety of psychological phenomena [**e.g.** a

Joann Little, an Angela Davis, a Misty Knight, and in poignant moments, an Audre Lorde, an Alice Walker, a Friday Foster], the social pressures are too extreme, too **internalizing** to sculpture a caustic, female autocrat **a la** Nightshade.

There are, I suppose, experiences deeply felt, private things in this instant of life, that are not easily communicated or quickly anticipated from comic book philosophies. Still, the industry has occasionally shown an uncanny empathy for sober aboriginal motifs, and has invented heroic women of color who are multi-layered, luxuriantly singular persons whose lives are a kiln of physical griefs and emotional fatigues and ethereal connections narrowly missed or hoped for. Two such ladies are the street-smart detective Misty Knight, and the regal elemental Ororo [Storm] of the New X-Men.

When writing on the subject of black feminine beauty, noted black historian Lerone Bennett, Jr., wrote, "Black beauty must be related to the whole of that ineffable, indescribable, indecipherable sauciness of spirit of a Sister in full flight, a Sister who loves, gives, works, shares, and endures." Misty Knight is very much a black beauty—the Sister Id in full flight. Wherein Friday Foster's silvery metaphysics at once glitter and repel, and Nightshade's misanthropic histrionics are the Devil's own, I am drawn to Misty's dark, deep, ebony candor. Her smoky unsophistication is altogether natural and real. She moves through the midnight sanctuaries that are her world with a sepia cool and a violent, feline stamina—sometimes touching, sometimes touched by the subterranean **beau monde.**

If Friday's ontogeny was Victorian, invariant, asexual, and Nightshade is neoclassic, reactionary, lush, Misty is contemporary, meteoric, frank. Her psychological struggles to accept the loss of her arm **(IRON FIST #6),** and her loathing of Cavendish for


THE WORLD WANTS TO GRIND US DOWN, MY LOVELIES!
IT PUT YOU IN A PRISON OF ROCK-- IT PUT ME IN A PRISON OF HOPELESS-NESS. I THOUGHT I COULD FREE US BOTH--
--BUT WE CAN NEVER BE FREE! THE WORLD DOOMS PEOPLE LIKE US TO FAILURE BEFORE WE BEGIN!
©1981 Marvel Comics GRoup

"Nightshade lives to realize personal power."

I THOUGHT WE'D HAVE A CANDLELIGHT DINNER, MY PEAR, AND THEN...OH, MAYA, AS ALWAYS, YOUR BEAUTY OVERWHELMS ME...
OH, GOD.
BUT AT WHAT COST?
I'M NOT ONLY INSIDE BUSHMASTER'S ORGANIZATION, I'M CLOSER TO HIM THAN ANY HUMAN LIVING.
©1981 Marvel Comics Group

"Misty's earthbound sexuality is her strength..."

his supposed part in the affair, are well known—as is her volcanic, incandescent romance with Iron Fist. Truly, Misty's earthbound sexuality is her strength and on one occasion at least, she has used it like a key, a ruse, a weapon. We saw her vamp with breezy grace and wit in **IRON FIST #15,** submitting to the villainous Bushmaster's kiss with parted lips, but with her tongue as a katana.

To date, Misty has been given considerable creative attention, and her persona seems to flow and twist away in several directions. Misty can be and often is rash. She will reach for her gun in an instant and ask questions later, for example, and her mission against Bushmaster nearly cost her not only her love affair with Iron Fist, but her life as well. Hip and intense [Misty to Power Man: "Cage, I'll say this once: I am not your 'mama,' sweet or otherwise. Dig?"], valorous and resolute [Misty to Iron Fist: "What we had was good, Danny. I had such hopes, till you forced me to choose between your 'friendship' an' us...an' my principles. It would have killed me to give in but I almost did."], Misty has above all an uncompromised sense of self.

At the other end of the super-heroine spectrum is the Consummate Fantasy—Ororo.

Tall and with smooth amber skin, cat-eyed and snowy-haired, Ororo's pneumatic possibilites are a lyrical step beyond the vermin-infested gloom of "realism," and she is one of comicdom's most im-

Storm—both the "Consummate Fantasy" and "one of comicdom's most impressive costumed women."

pressive costumed women. She dispenses lightning bolts and cyclonic winds with deific aplomb, modulates precipitation with a thought, and once [**X-Men #121**] diffused a rampaging Canadian blizzard to save the world.

Although her orientation is "African," "Kenyan," perhaps [Ororo endured pubescence alone on the Serengati savanna, having been called there by an inner voice; nonetheless her introduction into upper middle class society was accomplished with industrious liquidity], she culturally represents no specific aborigine and is African only in that she is not West Indian or Polynesian. That she was once attentured as a weather deity of some sort, attended by sweating, frenzied tribesmen, contradicts any authentic African folklore known to me. But her Olympian mystique can perhaps be broadly associated with the Earth Goddess Ala of certain Ibo tribes of Eastern Nigeria. This benevolent Mother/Queen is the source of moral and physical fecundity and is protectress of the wild places [much like Ororo herself]. And Ororo, much like the goddess, seems to be the placatory element—the sister, the counselor, the arbiter, and upon Cyclops' departure in **X-MEN #138,** she became a natural, empathic leader. In the words of the black poet Dudley Randall, Ororo is "magic as a rising bird or a falling star." So there is the ambrosial Friday, the effervescent Ororo—bold and variegated shades of dark womanhood to be sure—suddenly, indelibly exerted upon the comics universe. "In the legends and deeds of black women, there is a new Eve awaiting creation," Mary Helen Washington writes in the introduction of **MIDNIGHT BIRDS,** an anthology of black women writers: "she will enlarge the world for Black women and ultimately enrich the lives of all." •

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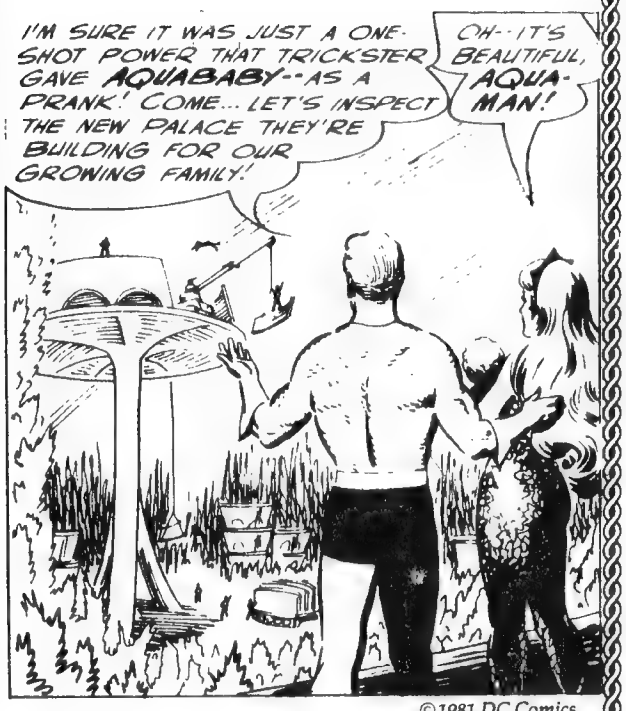
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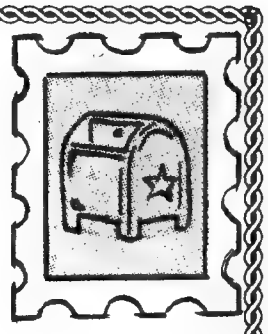
by Rich Morrissey

Rich Morrissey graduated from Worcester Polytech and got his law degree at Suffolk. He is a co-founder of Interlac, and has twice been central mailer of CAPA-alpha, as well as the editor and publisher of *BATMANIA*.



WHERE HAVE ALL THE HEROES GONE?

Among the many innovations frequently credited to **THE FANTASTIC FOUR** series, the first of the Marvel super-hero comics of the early 1960s, was its use of a real location, New York City, as the team's home base. And, indeed, it was a definite break with the tradition of the day to have super-heroes live in fictitious places such as Metropolis, Gotham City, and Coast City. Like many of **THE FANTASTIC FOUR**'s other breaks with the traditions of the time, the use of real locations in comic book stories has now become the generally-preferred practice of current writers. Indeed, in recent years even long-established heroes like Green Lantern have been moved from fictitious to real cities as a deliberate expression of policy on the part of their writers.

Yet **FANTASTIC FOUR** writer Stan Lee did not originate the idea, however unorthodox it may have been at the time, of using a real location for a super-hero adventure. In fact, the fictitious cities that once seemed indispensible for this type of story were only a gradual development—however, the heroes who began the trend and were most influential in the creation and development of other costumed characters, Superman and Batman, both originally operated in very real cities. In their earliest stories, The Batman was a resident of New York—while Superman operated out of Cleveland, Ohio. [This latter fact was not so surprising since both cities were the home towns of their respective heroes' creators.]

I suspect that the change of names that took place early in the development was due to their common editor, Vincent Sullivan. Fictitious cities were common in the pulp magazines of the day, especially when used as settings for events that their readers knew had **not** taken place in any real city, and particularly not in their own cities. In any case, within a year, Superman writer Jerry Siegel was referring to his hero's city as Metropolis, a generic term for any big city. Bill Finger dropped the New York references from the Batman stories, referring instead to Gotham City. [Gotham was an English town whose residents had entered folklore for their foolishness, and the name had become common slang reference for New York City.] Finger also adopted the Gotham City location for the original **GREEN LANTERN** strip, which he also originated, and it became one of several regular locales for the **JUSTICE SOCIETY** stories [a locale retained by Gerry Conway and Paul Levitz in their recent revival of the series].

In this regard, as in many others, practically all the other costumed heroes of the Golden Age followed the lead of Superman and Batman. By the end of World War II, it was almost impossible to find any super-hero whose home base was identified as a real place. Even those who had originally been specifically located became more vague or more fictitious—The Flash, for instance, originally lived in New York but later operated in Keystone City. Most later creations, even those as original as the Quality/Will Eisner **SPIRIT**, had fictitious home bases [like The Spirit's Central City] from the beginning. Still others, like Fawcett's Captain Marvel, evaded the issue by never referring to the city in which they operated by **any** name.

But whether identified or not, most of the cities of the Golden Age of Comics bore a great resemblance to each other—and to the real city of New York. To

be sure, not all were as obvious copies as Gotham City [and others that bore names like York City and Empire City], but most were about the size of New York, looked similar to it, and possessed landmarks reminiscent of those of New York. Even Metropolis, despite its original incarnation as Cleveland, came to owe more and more to New York as time went by. [Indeed, its skyline was far closer to New York's than Cleveland's from the very beginning—but that is probably attributable to Joe Shuster's love for skyscrapers. His first Superman story showed not only Superman's home city but also Washington, D.C., with towering buildings not to be seen in either Washington or Cleveland even forty-three years later.]

This Big Apple influence may have been due partially to the romantic aspect of New York [it had long been a favorite locale of fiction, and is much more familiar and interesting to most of the country and the world than most other American cities] but seems mainly attributable to the fact that almost all comic books were edited and published in New York, and therefore most of their writers and artists lived in or near it and were naturally inclined to use their own city for background detail. Indeed, in the 1940s, most of the writers and artists were native New Yorkers, relatively poor, and had little familiarity with any other city.

The exception that proved the rule was **WONDER WOMAN**, one of the very few Golden Age features [possibly the only one] that lasted for a long time in a setting [Washington, D.C.] that was a real city other than New York. But it must be remembered that Wonder Woman's creator/writer Charles Moulton [William Moulton Marston] was a wealthy and successful psychiatrist, far removed from the society and influences of most comic book writers—and he handled many other things differently from most other writers. By the late 1940s a hero could visit a real city [and Captain Marvel, for one, frequently did] but he almost never lived in one.

The few heroes who survived the Golden Age, mostly from DC, maintained the fictional-city tradition. It was only natural, therefore, that when DC began to reintroduce other super-heroes in the mid-1950s, it would maintain that tradition. But although its new heroes, most of them products of Julius Schwartz's editorial office, continued to live in imaginary places, those places seemed much more

FAREWELL-- DIANA-- MY DAUGHTER....!
NOW I MUST GO TO THE MEMORY BANK-- AND CHECK THE CHANNEL 3 THAT DIANA WASN'T SHOWN! AND SEE IF IT'S POSSIBLE THAT NUBIA IS REALLY-?
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scattered around the country. They seemed to bear much the same relationship to other American cities that Gotham City and Metropolis did to New York.

Hawkman, for instance, lived in Midway City, which paralleled Detroit. But Green Lantern's Coast City, while specifically located in California and very reminiscent of Los Angeles, contained elements of San Francisco as well. Also, while The Flash's Central City seemed to be only somewhere in the Midwest, it featured a futuristic Carmine Infantino skyline that evoked no memories of any existing city. Together with Gotham City as a New York parallel and the more ambiguous Metropolis and Star City [where Green Arrow lived], the Schwartz policy managed to spread DC's heroes of the early 1960s more evenly across the country than any publisher had ever attempted before—or, regrettably, has ever attempted since.

Stan Lee is usually credited with the decision to reverse the trend toward fictionalization and place The Fantastic Four in New York, and he probably deserves it. Although much of the innovation in the book was the work of its co-creator, artist Jack Kirby, none of Kirby's previous or subsequent work indicated any distaste for the idea of fictitious or unidentified cities such as Stan Lee has often expressed. Yet even Lee wasn't quite ready to break with established tradition as quickly as his subsequent statements would seem to indicate—for **FANTASTIC FOUR #1** refers to the story's location quite clearly as Central City!

Of course, in an interesting reversal of the histories of Superman and Batman, within a very few issues The Fantastic Four were clearly identified as

AS THE FLASH SPEEDS HOMEWARD AFTER HAVING SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED A CASE...
GREAT SCOTT! THAT TRUCK-- THE DRIVER MUST HAVE PARKED IT THERE ON THAT HILL! IT'S STARTING TO ROLL DOWN!
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residing in New York, where they have remained ever since. Most fans relegated this early reference, like those to New York and Cleveland in the DC strips, to an insignificant and uncanonical bit of trivia, although one recent writer has attempted to explain it by revealing Central City to be an experimental settlement in California that was later destroyed. In any case, Kirby's original Central City provides an interesting complement to the two other cities by the same name designed by two other great artists, Will Eisner and Carmine Infantino. They are all so different from each other (despite the fact that both the Eisner and Kirby cities were patterned on New York) that one look at them will suffice to refute the extreme minority that has contended that the worlds of The Spirit, The Flash, and The Fantastic Four are anything other than three completely separate ones.

Once made, however, Stan Lee's innovation was repeated with the other Marvel heroes he co-created. But if that was a progressive step, in another way he took a step backwards—he returned to the single urban environment of the Golden Age, which his use of real names made even more obvious than it had been then. The Fantastic Four, Spider-Man, Ant-Man, Iron Man, The X-Men, Thor—they **all** lived in or near New York City, and even the one exception, the roving Hulk, frequently visited it. That unusual circumstances could combine to create a super-hero is an accepted premise of the genre, but that out of all the world of Marvel so many such events should be concentrated in such a limited area seems, in retrospect, rather strange.

But at the time, it hardly seemed to matter. The only immediate objection that presented itself was how all these heroes could be crammed into one city without constantly bumping into each other. And Lee

"So [Lee] hit on the logical solution; his heroes *were* constantly bumping into each other!"

was still in an experimental mood, eager to try new things by carrying old and new ideas to their logical conclusion—so he hit on the logical solution; his heroes **were** constantly bumping into each other! Thus, from the beginning the Marvel Universe was a more cohesive and manageable place than the DC world that was eventually to be named Earth-One—and the potentially tedious single setting became an integral part of its charm. So Lee, his co-creators (and their successors) kept it up.

As the popularity of Marvel and its universe became more and more evident to the DC writers in the 1960s, DC began to take deliberate steps to duplicate Marvel's appeal. Nevertheless, most of its

SUPERMAN IS "OUT"!! SORE HEADS ARE "IN"!
BUT HE SAVED THE PROJECT! THE MILLIONS IN METROPOLIS! SUPERMAN SAVED US ALL!
SO? WHAT DOES HE WANT?— A GOOD CONDUCT MEDAL?
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Jack Kirby's *"Fourth World"* series was partially based in and around Metropolis. Superman turned up frequently.

heroes and their home bases were already established, so at first they showed little sign of following Marvel's lead in that particular area. Wonder Woman did move to New York in 1968, but that was in connection with a complete (and temporary) revamping of a character whose sales had already dropped but whose merchandising potential saved her from total cancellation. And, after all, Wonder Woman **had** been an exception to the usual DC rule from the very beginning.

Still, some fans were already beginning to find DC's fictitious cities, so obviously one of the major differences between it and Marvel, hard to accept. They weren't helped by the campy **BATMAN** television show of the 1960s, whose writers set out to ridicule many of the accepted traditions of the series—including the setting in a very close analogue of New York City. The show introduced Gotham City's Mayor Linseed (at the time, John Lindsay was the mayor of New York) and sent Batman and Robin to places like Londinium, which was as transparent a copy of London as Gotham City was of New York. After things like this, it was no wonder that fans began to find DC's cities increasingly difficult to take seriously.

And yet that very television exposure for Bat-

man—and Superman, combined with the generations of people who'd grown up with their comic books—made their home bases impossible to

Barbara Gordon prepares to pursue her other career as Batgirl, in Washington D.C.

change at that point. So many people identified Superman and Batman with Metropolis and Gotham City that it was no longer possible to change the names back to Cleveland and New York. Metropolis, in particular, was no longer **anything** like Cleveland—but how could it be New York if Gotham City was? The years of Superman/Batman team-ups in **WORLD'S FINEST COMICS** had made it very clear that the two heroes did not live in the same city.

And this was both the strength and the weakness of the Earth-One setup—its heroes, unlike those of the Marvel Universe, were not congregated in one city, and would be likely to stay that way no matter what the cities were called. That was seen quite clearly by Marvel prime-mover Jack Kirby when he moved to DC in 1970. His first creation at DC was the **"Fourth World"** series, which dealt with two whole planets of gods and their relationship with Earth—but most of the Earthly action was set in and near Metropolis. This was probably because Kirby chose to tie in **JIMMY OLSEN** [a pre-existing **"Superman"** title he was assigned along with his new series], but he clearly liked the idea of making use of the DC universe as it was. His later DC title, **THE DEMON,** was set in Gotham City, even though neither Batman nor any other pre-established character ever made an appearance in its pages.

Other writers also began to make use of the existing DC cities—especially Metropolis and Gotham City, now that they were not only the homes of whole families of existing heroes but also unrelated ones. The Creeper, a Steve Ditko-created hero whose city had previously been a typical Golden Age anonymous parallel of New York, was revealed by Len Wein to live in DC's identified New York parallel, Gotham City—while Tony Isabella set the adventures of his new hero, Black Lightning, in Metropolis and used several supporting characters and loose plotlines from the **"Superman"** and **"Fourth World"** series.

Even so, a definite trend toward the use of real cities at DC began around 1973. That year, Batgirl, a Batman spin-off who had previously shared her mentor's Gotham City, resumed her career in Washington, D.C.—and The Spectre, who had previously lived in Gateway City [a fictional city on DC's "Earth-Two," parallelling St. Louis, Missouri] was also revived as a resident of New York. In Batgirl's case, the change was understandable—she had been elected to Congress in her other identity, and even DC wasn't about to deny the true location of America's capital. Even The Spectre's new home [in a strip that deliberately ignored all previous continuity that didn't suit the author's purpose] was understandable in light of the increasing reaction

THE WORLD'S WICKEDEST SCIENTIST REVEALS HIS DIABOLICAL PLAN...
AS SOON AS WE'RE FAR AWAY, I'LL RING THE BELL BY REMOTE CONTROL!
THEN--HEH, HEH, HEH-- NO MORE PHILADELPHIA, NO MORE CAPTAIN MARVEL AND NO MORE KID ETERNITY!
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One of the "located" *SHAZAM!* stories.

against fictitious cites. But even if writer Michael Fleisher felt Gateway City had to go, why did he choose the increasingly-overused New York rather than the **real** St. Louis?

Probably because in his case, as in Stan Lee's, the factors that made New York [whether identified as such or not] so popular as a setting still applied. Most comic book writers and artists still lived in New York, and if anything, familiarity with a city is even more important if its real name is used. If Fleisher **had** used St. Louis as the setting, he would have risked making mistakes that would be delightedly caught by readers in that city—and he wouldn't even have the excuse, as previous writers did, that he was writing about an imaginary city that only resembled St. Louis.

Indeed, the influence of writers using cities they were familiar with was becoming even clearer at

Howard the Duck, the successor to Superman's Cleveland habitat.

Marvel as the 1970s wore on. New York remained the favorite location for heroes—even though, with all the new characters introduced at Marvel (and DC) during that decade, one wondered how any super-villain managed to operate at all in that city without having at least three heroes besides the star of the book leap on him as soon as he committed a crime. But a growing minority of heroes appeared in Los Angeles, which was becoming a popular location for writers and artists (particularly those with thoughts of breaking into television or movies) who had convinced the companies to let them work by mail. A few more ambitious ones ventured as far north as San Francisco, but Marvel continued to neglect the rest of the country as much as it always had.

Even at DC, the trend toward the use of real cities, particularly New York, made itself felt. Several minor-league heroes graduating into their own books (like Karate Kid and The Man-Bat) and new creations (like Firestorm) joined Wonder Woman there. Ironically enough, it was probably this trend that finally led the DC executives to get together and define the geography of the increasingly-complicated Earth-One. (If it **did** have a real New York, where **was** Gotham City?) Julius Schwartz and E. Nelson Bridwell collaborated on a map that established the locations of these places once and for all. For the first time, stories began to appear that established New York and Gotham City as separate cities, and it turned out that Metropolis was separated from Gotham City only by a bay. (It has been theorized that on Earth-One, the metropolitan areas that on our world became the boroughs of New York instead developed into separate cities.)

Yet, for all this development, the younger writers at DC remained as unwilling to use most of it as their counterparts (and they themselves) had been at Marvel. They continued to locate new heroes in New York, and even to send older ones there—at the expense not only of fictitious cities, but other real ones as well. Since the more established heroes remained immovable, the result was a curious situation in which the older heroes were spread across the country and New York became a hotbed of new, inexperienced super-heroes.

Occasional attempts were made to place heroes in other cities, but they were almost invariably sabotaged quickly by subsequent writers. The Man-Bat lived in Chicago for only one issue before being sent back to New York, and Wonder Woman was also returned there after a stint in Houston, Texas (although recently she has resumed her old Washington haunts). Supergirl spent a year in college in San Francisco, but was quickly moved to an ambiguous Florida location—and the current word is that she, too, will be moving to New York.

And why is this prediliction continued for a city that already has plenty of heroes? The old reasons aren't nearly as applicable as they used to be—most of the current generation of writers is much more familiar with the rest of America than the Golden or even Silver Age ones were, and could use other cities without difficulty. (And there are always such things as reference books, which surely writers who delight in digging up loose ends from obscure old comics wouldn't balk at using.) Indeed, other locations have been used, very successfully, with other characters than standard super-heroes: The Human Target lives in Boston; Swamp Thing and Man-Thing in Louisiana and Florida respectively; and Cleveland—the one-time home of Superman—now boasts the heroic services of Howard the Duck.

And are even the fictitious cities **that** bad? Writers and artists of the caliber of Will Eisner and Jack Kirby didn't think so, even if many of the young writers of today do. They probably shouldn't be introduced at Marvel at this point, as they no longer would be able to fit into its universe—but I see no reason why DC shouldn't continue to use, and reuse, the ones it already has. There are certain advantages to fictional cities that aren't generally realized any longer—for one thing, a story revealing the Mayor of New York to be in league with criminals would be grounds for a libel suit, but depicting the Mayor of Gotham City or Central City in such a situation can make for a fascinating story—and ultimately a more realistic one than would be possible in a real location. Few people since Eisner have used such themes, as DC traditionally tended to be reluctant to admit the existence of such things as political corruption—but in recent years such prohibitions have been relaxed, and political bosses played a very memorable part in such classics as the Batman six-parter by Steve Englehart and Marshall Rogers. Such things may not happen in any given city, and are hard to prove when they do—but they **do** happen in real life, and these and many other possibilities are ideal for a place like Gotham City.

In short, I'd like to urge writers and artists to expand their horizons and allow their super-heroes to discover—and reside in—more of the great country in which they live. •

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Kurt Busiek is a creative writing major at Syracuse University. He is currently studying in England.

THE MANY VIRTUES OF LOIS LANE

by Kurt Busiek

Not long ago, while at a party, I was subjected to a gleeful description of a 1960s **LOIS LANE** comic. In that particular issue, Lois decided to get rid of her primary rival for Superman's affections, Lana Lang, by marrying her off to that **schlep** Clark Kent. To do that, she tried to convince Lana that Clark was really Superman! I listened politely, but not particularly attentively. I, like most of the other modern comics fans I'd talked to, didn't have any great love for **LOIS LANE.** While we might admit [under duress] that there were quality comics in the funny animal genre, horror, or even western, **LOIS LANE** was generally considered to be vapid, silly, and below the critical regard of us sensible fans. Still, the conversation stuck in my mind enough so that the next time I was in the local comics store, and annoyed that out of a week's shipment of comics, only **one** was worth buying, I idly flipped through the **LOIS LANE** bin to see if I could find that particular issue. It wasn't there [as far as I could tell], but I did buy another issue that I'd had described to me, figuring both that it could hardly disappoint my expectations, and that it had to be more interesting reading than The Defenders' latest bout with the Mandrill—and I **loved** it! It was one of the most **readable** comics I'd run across in a long time.

Right now, I'd like to take this space to describe that era of **LOIS LANE** for those who've [like me] felt that there's nothing worth reading in those issues. I am now in possession of only five **LL** comics, so don't expect incredible expertise. I'm a stranger here myself...

First off, as I'm sure you know, Lois Lane is Superman's girl friend [for those of you who don't know that, it's on the cover of every issue]. This put her in a rather peculiar position, story-wise. She is ultimately a romantic interest character, and so one would expect the book to be a love comic. But she's **Superman's** romantic interest, which throws her into a super-hero milieu, not to mention her being a newspaper reporter adding to her capacity for adventure. Not content with this, DC added an emphasis on comedy stories, so that when you open a **LOIS LANE** comic, you're never quite sure what to expect—unlike the super-hero comics, where unless it's a change-of-pace issue, you can pretty well predict what sort of story you're going to get.

For example, you might find **"Lois Lane's Super-Gamble" (LL #56),** which is the kind of story most fans would expect from **LOIS LANE.** Lois' scheme to get rid of her primary rival for Superman's affections, Lana Lang [sound familiar?], goes swimmingly, with Lana falling madly for Superman's replacement, Ideal-Man. What Lana doesn't know is Ideal-Man is really...aah, you're way ahead of me. He's trying to teach the two girls not to be such scheming harpies, and it isn't going to work, of course, but what the Hell. Most of the story [including the "surprise ending" if you're used to this] is pretty familiar stuff. What makes the story so good is the main character. Lois is such a schemer, and so obviously enjoys manipulating other people [as long as it's successful] that the reader eagerly awaits her come-uppance in the end. Still, we hope it won't be too much of a fall, because Lana falls for the scheme so wholeheartedly, dropping Superman like a hot potato to pursue Ideal-Man, that we feel Lois is justified [if only she weren't so malicious]. It's fairly mindless comedy [better than **THREE'S COMPANY**], and it's fun.

If that's the sort of story you're expecting, though,

GOSH, I WONDER WHAT IDEAL-MAN LOOKS LIKE? MAYBE HE'S A REAL DREAM-BOAT...HANDSOME, AND WITH A TERRIFIC PHYSIQUE!
CHUCKLE! - LANA LOOKS INTERESTED! I KNEW SHE WOULD BE!
AFTER LANA LEAVES...
MY SCHEME IS SURE-FIRE! I'LL ENCOURAGE LANA TO PURSUE AND TRY TO MARRY IDEAL-MAN! BIG-HEARTED ME...HA, HA...WILL HELP HER LAND HIM! AFTER SHE'S HIS HAPPY BRIDE, IT'LL BE EASIER FOR YOURS TRULY TO GET SUPERMAN TO PROPOSE!
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Lois plotting against Lana: "What makes the story so good is the main character. Lois is such a schemer, and so obviously enjoys manipulating other people...that the reader eagerly awaits her come-uppance at the end."

you might be surprised when you run into **"The Amazing Hydro-Girl."** Superman doesn't even figure into this one (except for three relatively unimportant panels). Lois, on impulse (Lois is **very** impulsive), drinks an experimental hydronaut serum which allows her to breathe under water. One problem: If she doesn't immerse herself in some liquid (**any** liquid) at least once an hour, she'd die. Also, there were two hired killers looking for her (from the Anti-Superman Gang), and Clark was covering a fountain pen manufacturer's convention for the Planet. I won't reveal the ending—this one should be read—but I will say that it's a great story for those who like humiliation. Cut off from water by the assassins, Lois had to find liquid somewhere, and resorted to such things as refined oil and mercury. This one was a puzzle story with the reader trying to figure out how Lois was going to keep herself alive before we all actually found out.

At this point, you've probably noticed that these two stories didn't exactly give a complimentary treatment of Lois. Well, **LOIS LANE** as a whole can't be held up as an example of reasonable, positive portrayals of women in comics. In each, Lois was a snoop and a schemer who would stop at (almost) nothing in her quests to drag Superman to the altar or to get a juicy news story, and she was the butt of quite a few jokes on the part of Superman or the writer. Lana, her co-star for many of these stories, was, if anything, worse. But if you're going to insist that all quality comics are fair to women, you'll have a pretty short list, considering the history of comics. And **LOIS LANE** had one thing over its contemporaries: Wheras The Fantastic Four or The Avengers presented its female super-doops as usually-ineffectual adjuncts to the competent male heroes, **LOIS LANE** comics did much the same "job" on Superman that it did on Lois. He was a schemer, kind of fickle, and the way he kept Lois and Lana hanging on a string (begging for crumbs of affection from the crumb) was hardly polite. It's difficult to take these characters seriously, so why worry?

LOIS LANE was a member of the Superman "family" of comics, so it dealt with Superman quite a bit, and it brought up some interesting ideas. **"How Lois Lane Fell In Love With Superman" (LL #53)**, for example, examined the question of Superman's heroism. During Clark Kent's early days as a reporter for the Daily Planet, Lois liked him but detested his super-powered alter-ego. This was because she felt that Superman was no more heroic than anyone else—since he was invulnerable, there was no risk involved in his stunts. Lois thus rated him as a glory-hound and wouldn't have anything to do with him. By the end of the story, of course, Superman had proved his heroism after temporarily losing his powers, and Lois lost her heart to him (and could barely be civil to poor Clark). The idea that an invulnerable man didn't need a noble personality to make him an adventurer wasn't one that one would've expected DC to bring up. That they did deal with it, and in a romance story, was quite something.

Another thing I'd heard a lot about before reading **LOIS LANE** but had never actually encountered was Imaginary Stories. I was told that the reason they were so awful was that they were a cheat—they didn't really happen. That I don't understand. Comic books aren't newspapers. None of it **really** happened at all. If it's a good story, it's worth reading, and some of those Imaginary Stories were great! They could never have been done if they "really happened" within the Earth-One time-line, but it would have been a shame to deprive us of stories like **"Lois Lane's Greatest Rival,"** an Imaginary Story in which Lois married Superman—and then had to deal with the continual interference of the other major member of Superman's supprting cast, Jimmy Olsen. Again, Lois was in rare form. Just after she'd accepted Superman's proposal and they were about to seal it with a kiss, he flew off to go help Jimmy. Lois thought: "Darn that Jimmy! He **would** in-

terrupt the most precious moment in my life!" And then she vowed that Jimmy would not monopolize Superman's life so much. This would have been perfectly acceptable if it were not for the fact that she was watching Superman fly after an upside-down helicopter, with Jimmy in it, plummeting toward the street. Even at the wedding, when Jimmy came over to kiss the bride, she thought: "You don't know it, Jimmy...but this kiss means **goodbye!"** But no, Jimmy turned up everywhere the newlyweds went, until Lois took drastic measures to make sure that Jimmy wouldn't be a nuisance any more—she shorted out his signal-watch. The fact that that action very probably condemned him to death didn't seem to bother her. It's one of the funniest **LOIS LANE** stories I've read, and nothing like it could ever have been done without it, too, being imaginary. Now if the reader weren't told from the beginning that the story was an imaginary one, it **would** be something of a cheat, but as it stood, that particular story hardly fell into a class with the hoaxes and dream stories with which Imaginary Stories so often get condemned.

I don't know who wrote those stories, but the writing worked well. For those of you fed up with the current emphasis on snappy stylistic scripting [just dripping with drama], those stories can provide a refreshing change. The plot was everything in them, and the script served only to illuminate the story. The plots were usually more complex than you'll find in modern comics, and most of them fit in about eight pages. Still, one of the best parts of **LOIS LANE** comics was the art, and that meant Kurt Schaffenberger. Schaffenberger isn't an "action" artist—all his effort goes into storytelling. The art in **LL** was always clear and readable, no matter what was going on [and in case you hadn't guessed, some pretty weird stuff went on]. Aside from his clear storytelling, Schaffenberger is a master cartoonist, and his work on facial expressions and body language in **LL** was beautiful. In a medium in which artists draw

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"*LOIS LANE* as a whole can't be held up as an example of reasonable, positive portrayals of women in comics."

I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT FIND THIS PARTY A DRAG, LOIS! BUT YOUR EYES ARE SPARKLING!
I'M LOOKING FORWARD TO SEEING THE EXPRESSION ON SUPERMAN'S FACE! I UNDERSTAND THE SUPER-CREEP'S BEEN CARRYING A TORCH SINCE I JILTED HIM! I WONDER WHAT'S DELAYING HIM??
YOU'RE A LITTLE LATE!
I WAS DELAYED RESCUING A CRATE FROM HI-JACKERS! IT HAD BEEN EN ROUTE TO YOUR HUSBAND! I'LL OPEN IT!

Schaffenberger's Lois looking simultaneously delighted, devious, smug, and—charming.

everyone with identical features and faces range from boring to dull, an artist capable of any subltety is a surprise, and Schaffenberger's one of the most consistently surprising. His Lois could look forlorn, conniving, curious, or petulant—and always charming, to boot. His attention to detail is also worthy of praise. In the imaginary story I described, Lana Lang was not important to the plot at all. She got no dialogue—in fact, she only showed up in the wedding scene for one panel. In that **one** small scene, Schaffenberger made her look simultaneously happy for Lois and desolate at losing the Man of Steel. The only person in comics who could compare with Schaffenberger to any degree is Wendy Pini [she draws **ELFQUEST,** in case you don't read it]. Schaffenberger is often called boring by those who've seen the work of nothing but Kirby-inspired artists, which is unfair criticism. He has never tried to tell a story in the same manner as Kirby, Buscema, etc., and should not be judged by those standards. Like Ditko, Kubert, and Toth, Schaffenberger represents another independent method of comics storytelling—a valid method—and he is extremely good at what he does.

All in all, **LOIS LANE** would be difficult to consider high art, but as comics which are fun to read [which is obviously what they were trying to be], the Schaffenberger **LOIS LANE**s were excellent stuff. They're worth collecting for the covers alone, which were almost always curious scenes designed to make the potential buyer wonder what could possibly have come out of a scene like that. [One cover featured Superman staring in shock at Lois and Lana, who had put themselved into suspended animation, leaving a note: "Goodbye, Superman! We're tired of waiting for you to propose. When we wake up in the future, you'll be **dead, dead, dead!** —Lois and Lana."] If you've ever read these **LOIS LANE**s, then you know what I'm talking about, and if you haven't, then go buy one—it speaks for itself [buy #60, it's great!]. And if anyone knows which issue has the story in which Lois tries to convince Lana that Clark is Superman... •

GOOD GIRL REPORTER ART

or:

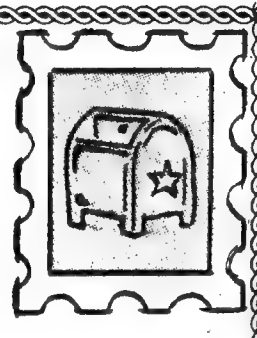
KURT SCHAFFENBERGER'S **LOIS LANE** COMICS

Kurt Schaffenberger's work can be seen in every issue of **SUPERMAN'S GIRLFRIEND, LOIS LANE** comics up until issue #81, after which he was replaced by Irv Novick, Curt Swan, and others. Schaffenberger's first assignment with the character was **LOIS LANE #1**, and he drew at least one story in every issue until #81. In the early 1960s, many comics, including **LOIS LANE**, tended to feature three stories per issue, and in **LOIS LANE**, at least one story per issue was drawn by Schaffenberger. During those years, he always inked his own pencils.

During the #20s of the series, Schaffenberger began doing covers for **LOIS LANE** as well. Although he did not do all of them [some in the series being done by Curt Swan, the regular cover artist for all the **"Superman"** titles, and some later by a new artist, Neal Adams], Schaffenberger occasionally drew a cover or story for other magazines within the **"Superman Family"** of titles.

Curiously, some Schaffenberger stories prominently featuring **LOIS LANE** appeared in other magazines, as with **"The Duel Over Superman"** from **SUPERMAN #150.** It is possible that such stories were inventoried for use in **LOIS LANE**, but were substituted for use in other magazines due to deadline problems. At any rate, excepting a few issues of **SUPERMAN FAMILY** during the late 1970s, almost all the work of Kurt Schaffenberger on Lois Lane can be found in **LOIS LANE #1-80.** •

Chuck Huber is a graduate of the University of Illinois with a B.A. in Chemistry. He has also attended the MIT Ph.D. program.



THAT'S WHAT FRIENDS ARE FOR— EVEN IN COMICS!

©1981 Marvel Comics Group
ALL RIGHT, WINGHEAD... SAY IT! GO AHEAD, SAY IT! THIS IS ONE TIME I GOT IT COMING!
THERE'S NOTHING TO SAY, FELLA. WE'RE ALL AVENGERS,
YES... BUT, WE'RE ALSO HUMAN BEINGS, WITH FEELINGS AND EMOTIONS!
YOU DID WHAT YOU COULD... NO MAN CAN DO MORE THAN THAT!
AND THAT'S THE GUY I'VE BEEN RIDING FOR MONTHS! I WISH THE GROUND COULD SWALLOW ME UP... RIGHT NOW!

by Chuck Huber

Recently, various articles have appeared in **COMICS FEATURE** which have dealt with the poor handling of love and marriage in the comics. This article assumes that this is a symptom of the general failure of the comics to deal with interpersonal relationships. While it's risky to refer to any relationship as more **fundamental** than that between a man and a woman in love, perhaps it can at least be said that there is a **broader** relationship which is at least as often neglected in the comics; that of simple friendship.

Friendship is, after all, one of the most common and necessary elements of human life. People need other people to whom they can open their hearts and with whom they can share their joys and their sorrows. How much more, then, ought this to be true with super-heroes? As the catch-phrase goes, "With great power comes great responsiblity," and great burdens must, if at all possible, be shared. It seems strange that writers so often neglect this need, or [if there is a good reason why the character should be a loner] the writer neglects to deal with the issue of loneliness. But friendships in the comics are definitely rare.

Superman is the oldest of the comic book heroes, and has one of the most constant and consistent casts of supporting characters. Yet among that cast he still lacks close friends. It's not entirely surprising in the case of Kal-El, since he isn't really human. Still, from what we've been shown of Kryptonian psychology, it isn't much different from that of Terrans, and so Superman really should need a close friend or two. Unfortunately, he suffers from the greatest barrier [apart from bad scripting] that can afflict a super-hero in search of friendship—a secret identity.

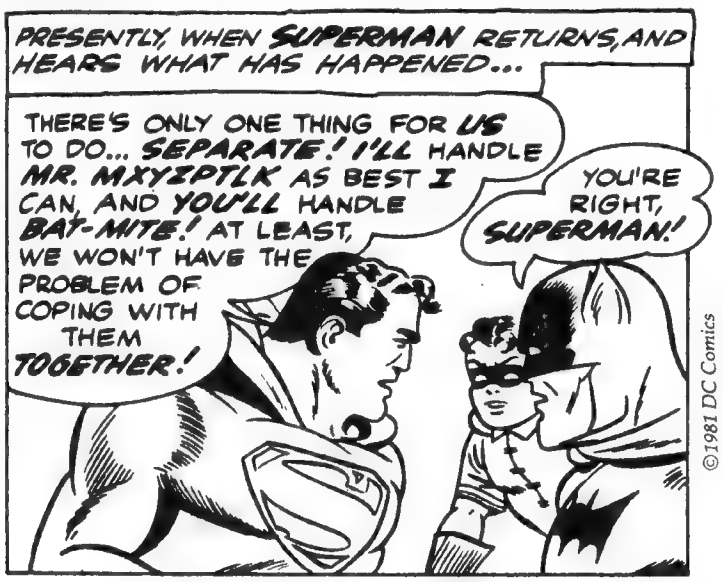
That is why one cannot accept the notion of Jimmy Olsen or even Lois Lane being close friends of Superman. No matter how much affection they feel for him, or he for them, half of his life will always be a closed book to them. He cannot really confide in them. In this case, the fact that Superman knows Jimmy and Lois in both of his identities **might** enable him to confide in them in both halves of his being without ever blending the two. However, there isn't really any evidence to suggest that Jimmy and Clark are even particularly close. The image of Jimmy which lingers in my mind is that of "Superman's Pal"—a Boy Buddy, not a real confidant as would happen among true equals. Lois is another matter. At times she and Superman have gotten fairly intimate, but Lois' attitudes toward Clark have changed so often over the years that it's hard to distinguish a true friendship between them.

What about those characters who know Superman's dual identity? I've never been convinced that he and Supergirl are very close friends. They don't seem to spend much time together. Perhaps their relationship was somewhat distorted by Superman's paternalistic attitude towards her back in her old "secret emergency weapon" days. At any rate, ever since she gave up trying to trick her cousin into marrying Lois Lane [so that the couple could then adopt Linda [Supergirl] Lee, of course—], neither cousin seems to take much interest in each other's personal lives.

That brings us to The Batman. It is interesting that fate and sales figures have conspired to make Superman and Batman one another's best friends. Their styles of crime-fighting are very dissimilar, but some of their personal circumstances are very much alike. Each was orphaned at an early age, and in

violent fashion, and that fact is crucial to each one's super-heroic career. More importantly, each hero is the **best**—they are, in truth, the World's Finest heroes. It's not at all surprising that their friendship has grown quite close—still, it is a subject for some wonder how they ever got to be friends to begin with. In a sense, Superman and Batman represent the light and dark poles of super-heroics. When they first met, knowing nothing about each other except their public images, it was hard to see why the Man of Steel would have felt any kinship to the driven, obsessed Darknight Detective. Once Kal-El got to know Bruce Wayne, though, a partnership was almost inevitable.

Perhaps the reason they got together was that Batman has not always been as grim as he is currently portrayed. When he and Superman met, Batman was working with Robin, and when Robin was younger, Batman showed a different facet of his personality [perhaps feeling the need to set a good example for the boy]. At any rate, The Batman of that period was a far more accessible, approachable person, yet he also lacked any deep companionship then. Robin does not fill the same kind of friendship role that Superman does in Batman's life. Robin was, and probably always will be to Batman, a Boy Buddy. There is no sign even today that Batman will ever accept Robin as an equal, which is an essential prerequisite for deep friendship. For that matter, although Alfred is a confidant of sorts, he also suffers from being on the short end of the master/servant relationship. His training as the "perfect butler" keeps him from being totally frank with his employer despite their long association.


PRESENTLY, WHEN SUPERMAN RETURNS, AND HEARS WHAT HAS HAPPENED...
THERE'S ONLY ONE THING FOR US TO DO... SEPARATE! I'LL HANDLE MR. MXYZPTLK AS BEST I CAN, AND YOU'LL HANDLE BAT-MITE! AT LEAST, WE WON'T HAVE THE PROBLEM OF COPING WITH THEM TOGETHER!
YOU'RE RIGHT, SUPERMAN!
©1981 DC Comics

"It's not at all surprising that [Superman's and Batman's] friendship has grown quite close—still, it is a subject for some wonder how they ever got to be friends to begin with."

Batman is hardly the loneliest super-hero, though. That prize must go to Peter Parker, the original

WELL, SPIDER-MAN? IT'S ALL UP TO YOU.
YEAH, I SEE WHAT YOU MEAN.
IF YOU'RE IN--YOU'RE IN ALL THE WAY.
BUT THEN--YOU'RE NOT JUST ANYBODY, ARE YOU?
YOU'RE GONNA BE MY PARTNER.
I'VE GOT TO DO IT!
IT'S JUST THAT--IT'S SO HARD--
--LIKE PULLING OFF YOUR OWN FACE--
--TURNING ME INTO SOMEBODY ELSE--
IT'S JUST THAT-- I'VE NEVER REALLY FELT I COULD TRUST ANYBODY BEFORE --WITH ANY SECRET I HAD...
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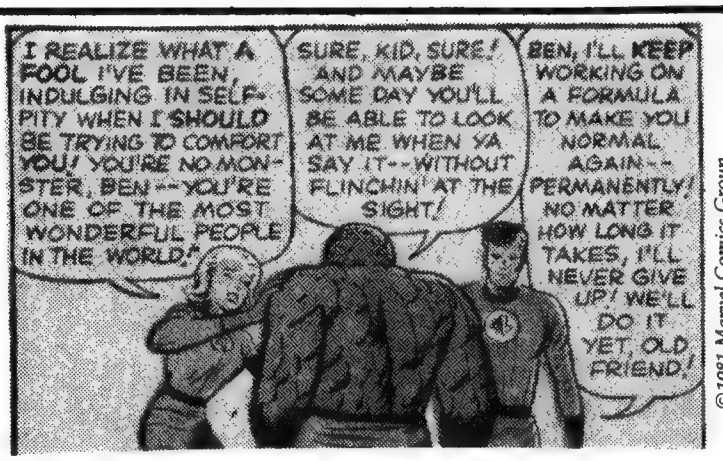
"...a conscious realization on the part of the writers that Peter Parker is simply too neurotic to open up to other people..."

super-hero-with-problems. Parker is the archetypal victim of his secret identity in terms of it denying him friendship. The most interesting thing in Parker's case is that it need not be so. Unlike Superman, none of his friends as a civilian are friends of Spider-Man. Therefore, there is no real danger of Spider-Man's enemies trying to force the secret out of them, because there's no reason for anyone to suspect that, say, Flash Thompson knows who Spider-Man really is. The other danger is that the person in question might be a blabbermouth who would let the secret slip. I can certainly understand Parker's reluctance to let Mary Jane Watson know, or his grad school chums, but why couldn't he trust Joe Robertson? He knows that Robertson is intelligent, level-headed, trustworthy, and—due to his newspaper man background—knows the importance of keeping one's sources confidential. For that matter, Spider-Man has met almost every super-hero in the Marvel Universe: why hasn't he ever confided in The Fantastic Four? He's known them for almost his entire career [particularly Johnny Storm], yet he's never taken off his mask with them once. Or how about Daredevil? Thre are three possible reasons why Peter Parker has never seen fit to unburden himself to another human being. Two are simply bad writing: either the writers over the years haven't realized the importance of friendships, or they have done so, but

they have avoided such a development in order to maintain the status quo on the strip.

The third reason, though, represents good characterization. That reason would be a conscious realization on the part of the writers that Peter Parker is simply too neurotic to open up to other people, and that the identity of Spider-Man is just the excuse fate has given him to keep his distance from his fellow human beings. If it hadn't been for the radioactive spider, Parker would have continued to be shy and bookish, and retreated from the world that way. If he had wanted to, he probably could have gently revealed his spider-powers to Aunt May shortly after he received them, before Spider-Man had a bad reputation, without endangering her "weak heart," but he chose not to do so because of his insecurity. Now, he probably subconciously associates the death of Captain Stacy with the fact that Stacy knew his identity, and so feels compelled to remain silent. All in all, Parker's loneliness probably stems from a mixture of perceptive and inept writing, but either way Spider-Man is an interesting negative example of the role of the friendship in the comics.

Not all is gloomy at Marvel, though. The Fantastic Four stands as an old and consistent example of heroes treated as friends. The friendships between Ben and Reed and between Ben and Johnny [and the insightful portrayals of them] were among the highlights of the over one hundred issues of Lee and


I REALIZE WHAT A FOOL I'VE BEEN, INDULGING IN SELF-PITY WHEN I SHOULD BE TRYING TO COMFORT YOU! YOU'RE NO MONSTER, BEN--YOU'RE ONE OF THE MOST WONDERFUL PEOPLE IN THE WORLD!
SURE, KID, SURE! AND MAYBE SOME DAY YOU'LL BE ABLE TO LOOK AT ME WHEN YA SAY IT--WITHOUT FLINCHIN' AT THE SIGHT!
BEN, I'LL KEEP WORKING ON A FORMULA TO MAKE YOU NORMAL AGAIN--PERMANENTLY! NO MATTER HOW LONG IT TAKES, I'LL NEVER GIVE UP! WE'LL DO IT YET, OLD FRIEND!
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The FF as a family: from *FF #11*.

Kirby **FF**s. Certainly only an incredibly deep friendship between Ben Grimm, Reed Richards, and the Storms would justify taking such a motley crew up in one of the first manned space flights. Though this relationship has at times been shorted by other writers, the prime achievement of the Moench/Sienkiewicz reign on the book has been a re-emphasis on The FF as a family. No other group in comics functions quite so much in that way. That's why the stays of Medusa and Luke Cage [and to a lesser extent, Crystal's "membership"] with the team didn't work out. Trying to substitute other heroes for Sue and Ben or whomever is treating The FF like The JLA or The Avengers when they're not **just** an organization of heroes.

Other super-hero teams ought to be fertile fields for friendships to develop. There, usually, secret identities aren't a problem and it makes sense that the bond of a common calling would help interpersonal relationships. Unfortunately, those relationships still aren't as common as one might hope. One problem is that even within the confines of the teams, writers usually don't try to develop characters who also have their own solo strips, assuming that the writer of the solo series has "first dibs" on character development. Of course, if there's any overlap of writers or editors, more can be accomplished. Thus, at DC in the early 1960s, the Flash/Green Lantern team appeared, followed by the Atom/Hawkman team. Barry Allen and Hal Jordan got together fairly frequently in the early days, though there wasn't much explanation of their friendship. The police scientist and the test pilot didn't really have much in common other than their superheroic careers, but it seemed to work, and differences in background **needn't** be an impediment to friendship.

Unfortunately, in recent years not much has been done with this relationship. Two golden opportunities in particular were missed: The first was when Hal Jordan was having all troubles with Carol Ferris [**GL #49**, etc.]; Hal should have sought out the advice of his happily-married fellow JLAer. Similarly, after Iris Allen's death, Green Lantern should have been much more in evidence trying to console Barry. There is some sign [**e.g.** in **JLA #186**] that Gerry Conway has remembered the Allen/Jordan friendship, but it's still too early to say if there's really going to be a revival.

The other old JLA friendships have also suffered greatly from inattention. The attraction between the two most science-oriented JLA members, The Atom and Hawkman, was very natural, and was generally well-handled, but neither character had a solo strip long enough for much to come of it. The Flash and The Elongated Man were also old buddies, and the camaraderie between the fun-loving, egotistical Ralph Dibny and straight-laced Barry Allen formed the basis for a solid relationship, but after Ralph stretched off into **DETECTIVE,** it was allowed to lapse. As with Hal Jordan, Ralph and Sue Dibny should have rushed to Barry's side when his wife died, but that point was totally overlooked.

As with The JLA, The Avengers boasts a fair degree of camaraderie among its members. Supposedly one of the oldest and strongest friendships in the group is between the two senior members, Thor and Iron Man. The relationship is not too surprising. Though Tony Stark has had a surprisingly large number of friends who know [or have known] his secret [Happy Hogan, Michael O'Brien, and Whitney Frost—not to mention the late Abe Klein, the late Kevin O'Brien, the amnesiac Marianne Rodgers, plus

BUT I MADE IT--AND SO WILL ME! GO ON--GET MOVING!
AND IF YOU FIND THE THUNDER GOD IN THE SAME ROOM WHERE I FOUND IRON MAN--SAY HELLO FOR ME--OLD FRIEND!
SO HE KNOWS! AFTER ALL THESE YEARS TOGETHER, I WONDER WHO THE TWO OF US THOUGHT WE WERE FOOLING!
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"Steve Englehart wanted to make Thor and Iron Man best buddies, and the device has worked well since, so the temporary increase in Tony's deductive faculties can be forgiven."

The Wraith, and Bethany Cabe, who each know but haven't told Tony they know...] he's never confided in any of his fellow Avengers, who, presumably, would be best able to understand his problems. The reason seems to be Iron Man's feeling of superiority over the other Avengers. He has gotten to be leader of the group, one of the most powerful members, **and** the financial "angel" of the group. The only one he can't lord it over is Thor. The Thunder God, too, considers himself [with some justice] to be a cut above his fellow assemblers, yet he does feel a need for someone on Earth to open up to on occasion. The strange aspect of Thor's and Iron Man's relationship is not that their mutual respect developed into friendship, but that it happened in such an odd manner. In **THE AVENGERS #113, "Your Young Men Shall Slay Visions,"** Tony Stark reveals to Don Blake that he knows Thor's secret, and in turn acknowledges his own secret identity. Blake thinks to himself that they had been fooling themselves all those years, rather than fooling each other. But... in all those years Tony Stark had **never met** Don Blake before [although all The Avengers did know that Blake had some connection with Thor]. Well, Steve Englehart wanted to make Thor and Iron Man best buddies, and the device has worked well since, so the temporary increase in Tony's deductive faculties can be forgiven.

Some characters just seem more naturally gregarious than others. One of the older friendships at Marvel is that between The Beast and Iceman. The outgoing, somewhat immature Mr. Drake and the bookish Mr. McCoy got along famously throughout the run of the original **X-MEN,** and were one of the best models in the comics of the "old school chum" style of friendship. [Maybe they could be considered the super-heroic answer to Archie and Jughead.] After Hank McCoy struck out on his own, though, he didn't have much to do with Iceman any more. I really don't think that he should have avoided Bobby as thoroughly as he has, but he did find a new career and new friends in The Avengers to keep him busy. Statements from Chris Claremont to the contrary **(X-MEN #134),** Hank does have one close friend in The Avengers, namely Wonder Man. In fact, ever since Simon [Wonder Man] Williams regained consciousness in **THE AVENGERS #153,** he and Hank have been close. Their friendship works thanks to consistently good characterization of Wonder Man as a man who is unsure of himself since his rebirth, wondering just who and what he is. The Beast also underwent a rebirth, but he has fully come to terms with his new life [helped not a little by the fact that in the Marvel Universe most women seem to find blue fur an aphrodisiac]. He has recognized a kindred spirit in Simon Williams' and has done his best to make him feel human again. Their friendship has been evoked unobtrusively and well.

Among the New X-Men, the closest equivalent to the Iceman-Beast duo is the Nightcrawler-Colossus pair. They even have their counterparts to Vera and Zelda in the persons of Betsy and Amanda [although admittedly Zelda didn't seem to have the proclivity for the mystic arts inexplicably assigned to Amanda...]. Unfortunately, the relationship between the two of them has seemed to be **too** much like that of Hank and Bobby. Drake and McCoy were each from similar middle-class American backgrounds, and their lives outside The X-Men were pretty standard American fare. Kurt and Peter, on the other hand, come from very different backgrounds, and are immersed in an American environment which ought to be rather alien to both of them. Yet most of the time none of the assumed ramifications of that fact have shown through. This is not to say that they shouldn't be friends; quite the contrary, but their interplay should be handled differently.

Two friendships between super-heroes were imposed due to sales figures more than anything else: Power Man/Iron Fist and Green Lantern/Green Arrow. The former is awfully improbable given the backgrounds of the characters, yet I feel that it has worked. The latter had a somewhat natural starting point in The JLA, but I don't really feel that it worked. In both cases, one character [IF and GA] suddenly thrust himself into the life of the other [LC and GL]. The difference is in the reason why each of the blond-haired super-doers approached his dark-haired chum-to-be. In Iron Fist's case, he offered to help Luke Cage rescue his friends from the malevolent Bushmaster out of a sense of sympathy for a man in

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"...it always seemed as though Cap were looking more for a replacement for his long-lost Bucky. On the one hand, Cap worried about losing his partner..."

a bind. Green Arrow attached himself to Green Lantern in order to teach him how to use his great power—not out of any concern for Hal Jordan. Ever since he developed a personality, Oliver Queen has not shown any inclination to learn from anyone else, wrapping himself, rather, in his self-righteousness like a royal robe. Only the revelation that his ward Speedy was a heroin addict shook him at all. Now I suppose there is a place for a super-hero with that particular flavor of arrogance, but he's not the type that I would expect Hal Jordan to have become friends with. The guy's just too insufferable—Hal's never been **that** lonely. On the other hand, Danny and Luke have been portrayed as having a mutual respect and each has learned things from the other.

But an abrasive personality need not be a bar to friendship. When Hawkeye was introduced to The Avengers (in #16), Stan Lee portrayed the archer as a rather obnoxious egotist. In particular, Hawkeye was obviously jealous and resentful of Captain America. Then, in issue #29, Cap didn't criticize Hawkeye for letting the archer's brainwashed lady-love, The Black Widow, escape. From that point forward, Hawkeye became, in his own words, "one of Cap's biggest boosters." He still had his insecurites and could still be boorish toward the other characters, but never again did he treat Cap badly. Though not all of the subsequent **AVENGERS** writers have emphasized the Cap-Hawkeye relationship, Steve Englehart used it in exquisite fashion in Cap's own strip. In **CAPTAIN AMERICA #176,** Steve Rogers decided to abandon his super-heroic identity after his disillusionment by The Secret Empire. Several of the other Avengers tried to persuade him. through a number of lines of reasoning, not to do so. They all failed. But in #179, Hawkeye, in his guise as The Golden Archer (!), found the solution: **another** super-heroic identity for Steve Rogers. He alone knew Cap well enough to realize that his conscience would not let him be the symbol of an America he'd lost faith in, but it would also not let him stand idle while his abilities were needed. The best way for a writer to show deep friendship is to show that one friend has insights into the other's personality that even he himself lacks, and to have that friend act on those insights in a supportive manner.

It might seem rather odd that Hawkeye should have an insight into Steve Rogers' character that Cap's long-time partner, The Falcon, lacked. However, in light of Cap's overall relationship with The Falcon up to that point, it's not so odd. The Falcon was created in **CAPTAIN AMERICA #117** by Stan Lee. In somewhat contrived fashion, Cap, then in the body of The Red Skull, discovered a young black man who was fighting The Exiles. He enlisted that man, one Sam Wilson, to aid him in his own battle with The Exiles (and subsequently, with The Red Skull). According to #126, in which The Falcon next appeared, the two had become friends. Yet, after the partnership was formed in #133, it always seemed as though Cap were looking more for a replacement for his long-lost Bucky. On the one hand, Cap worried about losing his partner (as in #144 in which Falc allegedly went off on his own, or when Leila entered Sam's life), but on the other hand, Cap wouldn't confide in Sam when he was having troubles with his then-girlfriend Sharon Carter, or when he went undercover with the police in #139, and he sought to keep Sam (and Sharon) out of the fight.

At the same time, The Falcon was constantly trying to prove himself worthy in his own right; as in when he tried to capture Spider-Man in #137, or went out on his own in #144 and #177, and when he got help from The Black Panther in #169-71. I think that, despite any conscious protestations, neither partner subconsciously considered their relationship to be one of equals. Of the two, The Falcon probably demonstrated the truer friendship during this period, as evidenced by his concern over Cap's reputation in

both the **"1950s Cap"** and the **"Secret Empire"** affairs.

The turning point in their relationship would have to be the Englehart **"Real Origin of The Falcon"** in **#**186. Even though the revelation that Sam Wilson had a past as a mobster before The Red Skull revised his memories didn't jibe very well with the various relatives and friends [see **#**134] who only seemed to know Sam the Social Worker, the rather bizarre plotline did lead Cap to showing more real concern for The Falcon as a person rather than as a partner/Bucky-surrogate. Even during the 1970s Kirby reign, despite the butchery of Sam's personality, Kirby probably displayed a truer friendship between Steve and Sam as well or better than it had ever been done up to that point. Alas, all the subsequent writers have tossed The Falcon into the background, and it's hard to predict where or when the friendship, if not the partnership, will be resumed.

The alert reader has probably noticed that so far in this article, there have been a lot of **he**s and very few **she**s mentioned. This is due in no small part to the fact that there have always been far more male characters than female characters in the super-hero comics with which I've been dealing. Moreover, most comics writers have been men, and have been hesitant or uninterested in dealing with female-female relationships. This is changing somewhat nowadays. Marvel has the Colleen Wing-Misty Knight duo, DC, the Huntress/Power Girl team. In both cases, there seem to be genuine friendships, but neither has gotten enough consistent to be very well elaborated. Spider-Woman seems to have found as genuine a friend as a super-doer can have [without revealing her identity] in the person of Lindsay McCabe, but Jessica Drew has gone through a different personality with each writer, so it's a bit early to tell whether there's any real substance to that relationship. The Valkyrie/Hellcat friendship has the potential to be interesting, with the contrast between their vastly different backgrounds. However, the individual characters have been so ill-defined for so much of their careers, it's hard to make much clear sense out of the combination. At least there is some hope that new **DEFENDERS** scripter J.M. DeMatteis will make some sense out of the exiled Norse goddess' reactions to Earth, and be able to get behind Hellcat's "hunk-lovin' " airhead facade. According to **X-MEN #136,** the late Phoenix considered Storm to be "closer to [her] than [her] own sister." Unfortunately, we never got to see how it was that Jean Grey and Ororo could have become such allegedly close friends. It simply **happened,** in **X-MEN #100,** when as far as we the readers knew they had hardly been introduced before Jean left the team. Now there was no reason why the two women should **not** have been friends, but friendships as supposedly deep as "closer than sisters" should **not** be allowed to develop off-panel just for the sake of expediting

"[Iron Man] had gotten to be leader of the group, one of the most powerful members, *and* the financial 'angel' of the group. The only one he can't lord it over is Thor."

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"Both Jim Shooter and David Michelinie have made it amply clear, however, that even while Wanda remains passionately in love with The Vision, she and Hawkeye remain true friends."

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YOU DREAMED UP THIS PHONEY DUEL TO EMBARRASS ME BEFORE SUPERMAN! YOU WANTED HIM TO GET ANGRY WITH ME!
BUT I'M NOT ANGRY! WHY DON'T YOU LISTEN? I TRICKED BOTH OF YOU TO TEACH YOU A LESSON, NOT TO DUEL OVER ME! I USED TWO ROBOTS! ROBOTS, YOU HEAR?

©1981 DC Comics

"To paraphrase the old saw about the Americans and the English, [Lois Lane and Lana Lang] are (or were) two women separated by a common love-interest."

the story.

Perhaps surprisingly, a strong case could be made that the strongest and most enduring friendship among women in the comics is that between Lois Lane and Lana Lang. To paraphrase the old saw about the Americans and the English, they are [or were] two women separated by a common love-interest. In the grand old tradition of Betty and Veronica, Lois and Lana have repeatedly been shown to be very close friends, but they just as repeatedly double-crossed one another and made fools of themselves over Superman. All this was, of course, just part of the general abuse of otherwise intelligent women that went on in the Superman "family" of comics up until the later 1960s. Still, every so often, even in those days, Ms. Lane and Ms. Lang seemed to realize that they weren't each other's enemies in the face of a greater common foe—Superman himself. The most entertaining example of this was in **SUPERMAN #150, "The Duel Over Superman."** In that story, the two girls [they certainly weren't treated like women...] hit on another harebrained scheme to get Superman to declare his love for one of the other: they would pretend to fight a duel to the death to settle the question. Naturally the they assumed that Superman would find out about the "duel" and rush in to confess his true feelings. Naturally instead, he found out the truth and decided, as usual, to "teach them a lesson." He managed to separate the girls at the site of the impending duel, and substitute robots so that the two separate duels were fought, and each LL thought that she had inadvertantly killed the other. However,

displaying an unusual degree of intelligence for those days, they found the two robots afterwards and used them to teach the Super-Chauvinist a lesson. Lois and Lana walked off arm-in-arm, smiling, leaving Supes with conspicious traces of omelette on his face. Alas that such did not occur more often. It is also unfortunate that now that Superman has finally openly declared his love for Lois that the writers have allowed the Lois/Lana friendship to dissolve as well. They seem to assume that Lana is incapable of being mature about the whole thing, or that Lois no longer needs any other friends now that she has a marriage IOU from Kal-El. This is not good characterization.

I have deliberately neglected treating the friend-

HEY, EASY, DOLL! CAREFUL! THIS FORK I'M HOLDING MAY BE LOADED!
CLINT, IT'S SO GOOD TO SEE YOU AGAIN! I CAN'T TELL YOU HOW MUCH I MISSED YOUR AGGRAVATION!
VERILY, THY PLACE IS E'RE AMONG US, ARCHER!
SO SAY WE ALL!
©1981 Marvel Comics Group
"..and, when [Hawkeye] actually returned...he was greeted with an overjoyed hug."

ships between lovers in the comics. While there is no doubt that Hank and Jan Pym or Carter and Shiera Hall are one another's best friends and closest confidants, their love is more than that. The topic of the comic book romances has been mentioned already in part in the previously-mentioned **COMICS FEATURE** articles. But for this discussion, the really interesting point is the almost total neglect in the comics of friendships between men and women who **aren't** lovers. Comic book writers by and large seem unable to comprehend the notion of a man and a woman being close friends without there being some sexual undercurrents to their relationship. There are a few casual friendships which technically fall into that category: Storm, Nightcrawler, and Colossus; Misty Knight and Luke Cage; and some among The JLA and The Legion of Super-Heroes; but very, very few deep ones. Rita [Elasti-Girl] Farr **was** that close to Negative Man, Robotman, and Niles Caulder, her fellow Doom Patrol members, but they are all long dead. The only good example I can think of today is also, to my mind, one of the best-developed friendships in all comics: that of The Scarlet Witch and Hawkeye.

It is true that at various times in his ill-fated attempts at romance, Hawkeye has felt some passion for Wanda [though she never really reciprocated], but at the time of her marriage to The Vision in **GIANT-SIZE AVENGERS #4,** the bowman was genuinely happy for her, and has never since questioned the depth of her love for The Vision. Both Jim Shooter and David Michelinie have made it amply clear, however, that even while Wanda remains passionately in love with The Vision, she and Hawkeye remain true friends. In **THE AVENGERS #170,** Wanda reacted with delight at getting a phone call from the long-absent archer, and when he actually returned in #172, he was greeted with an overjoyed hug. In #173, after Wanda's husband and brother had each vanished [into the clutches of The Collector], Clint went out of his way to try to cheer her up. In #176, he tried in his own tactless fashion to convince Quicksilver to accept Wanda's marriage to The Vision. Wanda made a special effort to reassure Hawkeye when Gyrich rearranged The Avengers' roster in #181, and in #183, when Wanda and Pietro departed for Europe, there was a touching parting scene between the two friends at dockside. None of these "bits of business" were put in obtrusively or at the expense of the plot. All of them reaffirmed the fact that these two characters who have known each other for years have that special kind of friendship that enables each to sense the other person's cares, that enables each to derive joy from the other's presence. The writers have realized that such a bond is not maintained at the expense of other relationships, but rather lends its strength to them and enhances them as well. In a series as crowded as **THE AVENGERS,** carrying off such a consistent development is quite a feat indeed. With luck, it will not be neglected under the upcoming Mantlo/Colan regime.

This is a good point to wrap up the survey. If that most difficult [apparently] of friendships to handle, the man/woman friendship, can be carried off in a densely-packed team book like **THE AVENGERS,** then there's no reason why it can't be done elsewhere far more frequently than it is now for any and all kinds of friendships. A friendless character is not very likely to be a realistic one and recognizing the need of humans for friends is an important part of characterization. Writers should consider the implications of secret identities with regard to friends and follow up on them. Spider-Man may never get over his neuroses, but there's no reason to drive all of super-hero-dom into them. •

Richard Howell is a graduate of Harvard University with a B.A. in English and Art.

"The School of Comics Over-Writing, Part Two."

or:

BRAVO FOR BRAVO

©1981 Alex Toth

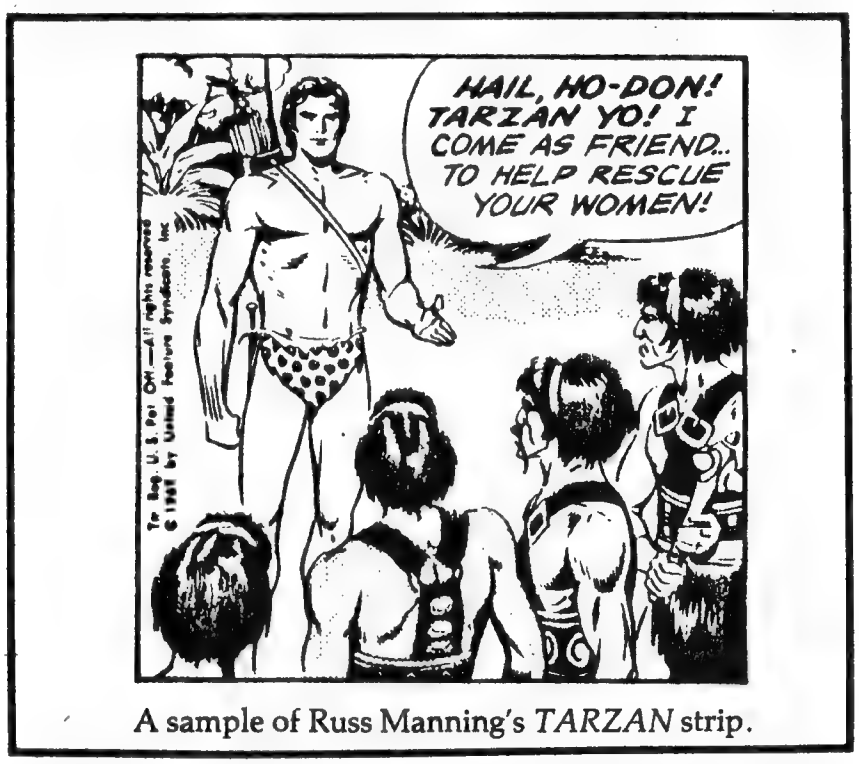
by Richard Howell

Last issue we discussed how the growing preponderance of verbiage in comics discouraged reader participation in interpretation of characters' motivations and decisions, as well as allowed the writers to substitute significantly less-than-heroic images in the place of their series' heroes, and still insist (through their heavy dialogue-and-caption overlay) that their "heroes' " motivations were sufficiently correct and well-intentioned. Last issue's readers will remember this being referred to as the "so-and-so is warm, compassionate, and caring—it says so right here" school of characterization (and interpretation).

Also mentioned was a notable (and rare) recent example of complex character motivation achieved through sparse dialogue (**HULK! #26, "A Very Personal Hell,"** by Jim Shooter and John Buscema), and its inherent weakness of presentation: that those readers with little-to-no real contact with any of the story's somewhat sordid subject matter might well regard it (due to its lack of captioned reassurance) as nothing more than a series of regurgitated cliches.

In addition, however fine the technique of **"A Very Personal Hell"** was, it was certainly no reconfirmation of the backsliding heroic ideal. Every one of its characters was severely flawed as people, and, although it might have been possible to feel sorry for some of them, certainly any reader admiration and/or any role model value gleaned from the characters would be out of the question.

To illuminate further aspects of the discussion, a look at the works of the man whose quotation began the first article: Russ Manning. Manning is probably best-known for his work on transferring Edgar Rice Burroughs' **"Tarzan"** character to comic books and (especially) comic strips (although Manning's other successful stints on the **STAR WARS** comic strip and the **MAGNUS ROBOT FIGHTER** comic book also come to mind). His drawing, plotting, and writing all share the same virtues: consistency, precision, and idealization. In Manning's own words, he believes in "clean, handsome, people," and that's



A sample of Russ Manning's *TARZAN* strip.

exactly what he presents: His women are so strikingly perfect as to be plasticene—never a hair out of place or a scruffed elbow; his men are always strikingly-yet-believably well-muscled, immaculately groomed, clean-shaven (all over), and boyishly hand-

some; his ink line is clean and well-regulated; and his panel composition, regardless of the complexity of subject matter, is always uncomplicated, directly forceful, and indicative rather than embellished.

It is his scripting, however, which is of direct importance to this article. Even as Manning's work embraces an idealized, beautifully composed portrait of existence—be it in 4000 A.D. or in the recently-past days in the jungles of Africa—so, too, does his writing present a somewhat overly-emblematic view of the forces at work in Tarzan's and Magnus' worlds. While on the one hand, Tarzan and especially Magnus are presented as imperturbably pure and invariably noble of motivation, the villains whom they face are bereft of any redeeming virtues. Inspiring as Manning's heroes might be as role models for younger readers, they lack even the surface complexity which might make them valuable totems to an older audience as well. Characters as unrealistically perfect as Manning's are, after all, are the type in response to which the present spate of morally shiftless "heroes" were introduced and popularized.

So unfortunately, Manning's work is not the answer to the problem caused, in part, by the "School of Comics Over-Writing." Manning's material **does** present a return to [or a maintainence of] the classic heroic image, but Manning's characters' heriosm is too black-and-white, too unsophisticated for a modern adult audience; the heroes and villains are symbols, absolutes, not characters.

Thus we are left with a dual quandary, the aspects of which are interrelated: that the "School of Comics Over-Writing" is, if not exactly responsible for the degeneration of the heroic ideal in recent years, at least representational of the removal of the final impediment in the path of that goal. If a comics writer can tell his/her readers that selfish, irresponsible, anti-social, or downright immoral actions [see last issue's examples] are "heroic" [and have them believe him], then the writer is contributing to both the trend toward devaluation of communication, and also towards widespread degeneracy and the erosion of idealism.

If this problem can be circumvented, then, it must be by an approach to comics writing and heroics which is multi-faceted and morally "ambiguous" enough to satisfy the audience too adult to usefully identify with overly symbolic protagonists, yet it also must be straightforward enough—both in style and content—so that each story's moral issues are identifiable, and that the writing makes no attempt to misrepresent the characters' actions.

While this might seem rather easy to achieve in comics, when one insists on the additional directive of "minimal copy," the number of writers who actually demonstrate any proficiency with the discussed objectives narrows to a handful: Steve Englehart is always expert at combining heroics with foibles, but does not concern himself overly with terse copy [except in **DETECTIVE**]; Milton Caniff can do anything, but he more consistently opts for a rather "talky" approach to heroics than the one under discussion; Leonard Starr tends toward brilliant presentation of stories which, in final analysis, have no real "heroic" images; Archie Goodwin's superhero work [particularly in **"Manhunter"** and **STAR WARS**] comes the closest to the ideal consistent combination of classic heroics and mature presentation.

The best recent example, however, both in terms of conciseness and heroic symbols, is Alex Toth's recent contribution to **THE ROOK** magazine, **"Bravo For Adventure."** In **"Bravo,"** both

"Toth masterfully presented the night scenes in a kind of chiaroscuro-kaliedoscopic montage.."

Toth's mastery of predominantly-visual storytelling and his fascination with the way things [especially heroes] were in The Good Old Days come to the fore. The story was essentially a "B" picture involving an honest, industrious, yet struggling charter flyer named Jesse Bravo and his involvement with a gambling czar, a rival flyer [who had used the identity of a dead friend of Jesse's to defraud the czar's gambling operation], and the rival's fiancee. The plot was the type which could easily have descended into tedium, yet—if it were the plot of a movie—could have been saved by a good cast, as was **CASABLANCA**, for example. Toth obliged. Jesse Bravo and Vivi Powell [the latter was the rival flyer's fiancee] were delineated as striking likenesses of Errol Flynn and a young Katherine Hepburn. As it would be in any hypothetical movie, watching those two characters play off of each other was delightful. Of particular note are the scenes in which they tussle, then explode in infectious laughter [**ROOK #3,** pages 45-6], and the tender meeting between them after Vivi's fiance's death [**ROOK #4,** pages 38-9].

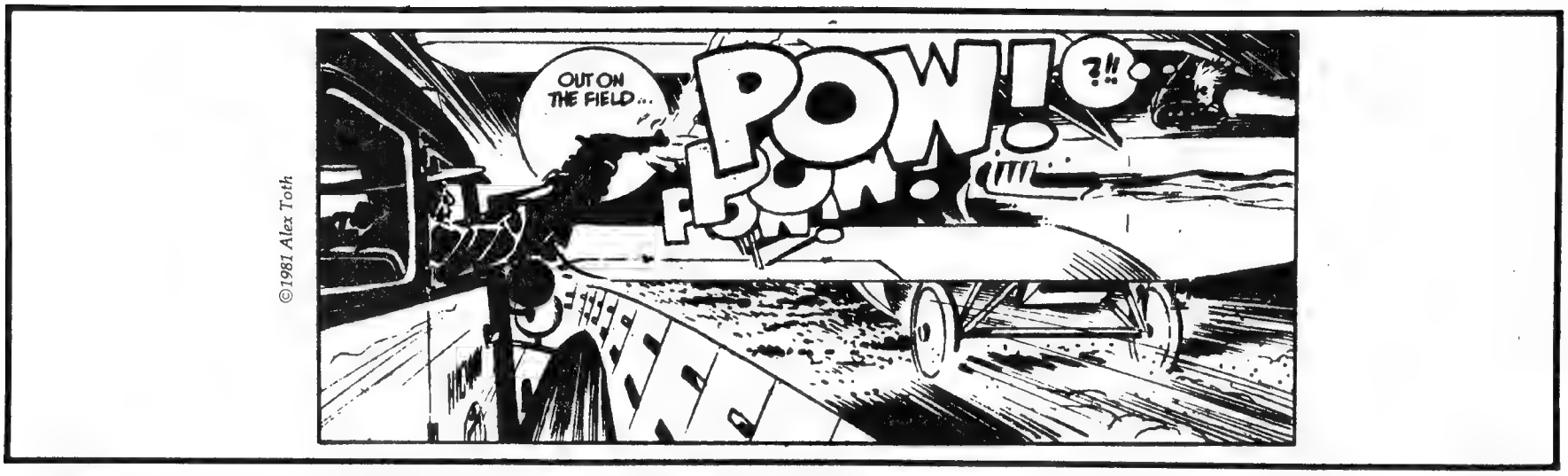
As might be expected, however, Toth's presentation of the story adds to the plot to the extent beyond which it leaves off being a melodrama and becomes a gripping, involving drama of powerful human passions. Few other artists can both maintain an expertly-rendered stylistic vision and still present a narrative—stripped-down and basic—about normal, non-super people, so directly and realistically that the reader **must** care about their lives. Perhaps the best illustration of this are the scenes at the airfield after Bo, Vivi's fiance, had tried to escape the police by stealing a plane. Unfortunately, both he and the plane were shot during his take-off, and everyone knew that neither had much time left. Toth masterfully presented the night scenes in a kind of chiaroscuro-kaleidoscopic montage—the famous Toth economy of line working in concert with the story's demands for verisimilitude.

Vivi Powell and Jesse Bravo: "...striking likenesses of Errol Flynn and a young Katherine Hepburn."

Toth's story presentation throughout **"Bravo"** is expert enough to defeat the entire impetus for the "School of Comics Over-Writing." Whereas most excesses in that line occur in the delineation of the story's action or the characters' emotions, Toth manages each visually.

Small talk: "...all the more clear and valid..."

For instance, in the scene in which Bo attempted to escape the highway patrol, there is a series of panels depicting the officers' car racing alongside Bo's plane, shooting at it. The action is fairly complex, yet Toth transmits both the necessary information and the scene's desperate feeling to the reader with scarcely any dialogue. His "line" of the sirens' "E's" sharply defines the path of the car, the increase in the siren's volume, and the moment's overall confusion. The series of superimposed **"POW**s**"** indicate in a very creative manner the fact that the patrolman was firing in sequence from a moving car. In the subsequent panels, the three-panel-continuity [that most misunderstood story device] is used to fine effect. When Bo heard the first shot [which struck the windshield] he turned in vexation. The second shot hit him [we can divine this in that Toth's drawing of Bo's face in that panel displays a suddenly-pained expression—and there is a hole in the plane which corresponds with Bo's body in the cockpit and was not there in the previous panel]. It is not clearly shown what became of the third bullet, nor is it necessary to know, for it is clear that Bo was severely wounded from the second one. He doubled over in the third panel, having been shot in the second. At that point, the **only** dialogue balloon for that entire sequence appears, and what it says is relatively unimportant.



Indeed, Toth seemingly prefers to have his characters **say** things which **are** relatively unimportant. Either he realizes that people are rarely able to verbally explain complex emotions, or he is giving the reader a chance to engage his/her own emotional faculties in reading the story (or both), but the result is that **"Bravo For Adventure"** 's characters' motivations seem all the more clear and valid for their (and their writer's) dismissal of glib, long-winded explanations. When Bo realized his indiscretions had cost him his job, his fiancee, and his reputation—and that his capture was imminent, he crashed his plane in a spectacular stunt. With nothing but his "It's no good! It's—over!", the reader could realize what must have been going through Bo's mind—his crimes, his hopes, his desperation—to lead him to suicide.

Another fine example of Toth's respect for his readers is the scene in which Jesse and Vivi meet in a coffee ship the morning after Bo's death. She had cut off her long hair that morning in a spontaneous gesture which she could not explain. In a small speech of naturalistic eloquence, she explained, "People do odd things in moments of grief, Jesse—acts of rebellion and outrage against all the forces in our lives upon which we have no control!—As for me, I might have cut my wrists, instead of my hair!" Toth credits us all with enough understanding of human emotions to be aware of the linked reaction between a change in life and a change of appearance—that, symbolically, Vivi Powell was cutting herself loose from the tatters of her old life as she cut off her hair. Once again, the reader is made a part of the story, as his/her empathy is called in to complement Toth's meaningful and naturalistic delivery.

Yet another aspect of **"Bravo For Adventure"** which certainly should not be ignored in light of the rest of this essay is that Toth's Jesse Bravo is, quite frankly, a heroic figure, and he proves it to the readers through his **actions.** Galaxy-saving aside, there is nothing more heroic than the conscienceable conduct of an honorable man, and Toth's Bravo is a fine example of one. His major action of heroism was his righteous outrage against Bo Bannon's "dirt[ying] the name of one of our finest airmen just to weasel out of paying a debt," yet Bravo also acted heroically in trying to stop Bo before the chase accelerated beyond the point past which the highway patrol would have shot the hapless flyer. Bravo also had the time and inclination to be genuinely tender and caring towards Vivi Powell—at a time when she needed it. During the times in which Bravo is not being heroic, he's busy either doing favors for friends (as with loaning Gus the plane) or having fun. Bravo presented the aspect of an honorable, well-rounded heroic character—neither an overly-pure mannequin nor a "hero-because-it's-his-book." The sum of all Toth's evidence is that Jesse Bravo is a fine man, and the reader doesn't need any captions to tell him so.

Indeed, there are many fine aspects of Bravo, **"Bravo..."** and Alex Toth's work on each—too numerous to list, let alone examine in detail. Perhaps it is enough to state that if heroes, comics writing, and story presentation were generally on the level of quality of **"Bravo For Adventure,"** there would never have been any reason for the "School of Comics Over-Writing" to ever have gained a foothold in comics. Sadly, such is not the case, but comics readers owe Alex Toth a large debt for proving that the combination of heroism and subtlety are neither retired nor divorced. We all owe Alex Toth a hearty "Bravo" for **"Bravo."** •

TALK, OR CRY, AWAY ALL THE HURT, VIVI — GET RID OF IT, NOW!
YOU HAVE ALL THE REST OF A GOOD LIFE TO LIVE!
TH-THANK YOU, JESSE!
©1981 Alex Toth

Bravo comforting the bereaved Vivi: "The sum of all the evidence is that Bravo is a fine man, and that the reader doesn't need captions to tell him so."

-COMING SOON-
FROM
NMP

ADVENTURE

ILLUSTRATED

EVERY SETTING
EVERY TIME
THE FINEST ARTISTS
THE BEST SCRIPTS
ALL WITH ONE THING
IN COMMON:

ADVENTURE!

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Murray Ward is a library assistant at the University of Manitoba, and a graduate of same, with a B.A. in English and Film.

Four-Color Words:

"MY HEROES DON'T DO THAT—AND GET AWAY WITH IT!"

by Murray Ward

The two hottest stories at this Summer's conventions were, of course, the surprising move of Roy Thomas from Marvel to DC, and the why-and-wherefore of the death of Jean (Phoenix) Grey in **X-MEN #137.** Both of these stories were being talked to death at the time, and by the time this article sees print, you'll probably all be tired of hearing about them for the millionth time. The above comment, however, sprang out of a panel discussion on the latter topic.

San Diego Con's "X-Men Panel" consisted of the series' then-creative team, Chris Claremont, John Byrne, and Terry Austin. Standing on the sidelines, however, and answering almost as many questions from the fans as the three panelists was Marvel editor Jim Shooter. It was he who made the title remark, while explaining his role in the demise of the Phoenix character. For those who still haven't heard the tale, or have forgotten it by now, writer Claremont had the deranged Phoenix, in her identity as Dark Phoenix, destroy an entire planet of sentient beings (the "asparagus people," he denigratingly called them, one of whom menaced The Avengers in their fourth issue—and was later befriended by them, but this CC tends to forget). An issue or two down the road, Claremont had intended to resolve the Phoenix plot-line by having the character shorn of her not-inconsiderable powers and much of her independent personality, after which she would again become plain Jean Grey, fiancee and eventual bride of Scott (Cyclops) Summers.

Due to the usual cacaphonious confusion of the Marvel offices, however, editor-in-chief Shooter didn't see the story in which Phoenix destroyed the planet until after the issue in which she was to lose her powers was in the final stages of creation. "Hey, what **is** this?" he intoned. "She's destroyed all these innocent beings for no reason. Chris, are you planning to explain that this didn't really happen?"

"No, Jim," replied Claremont. "She really did it, all right."

"Well, she can't do that!"

"Too late, that was last issue."

"What happens **this** issue? How is she punished for it?"

"She loses her powers."

"That's **all?**"

"Cripes, it **hurts!** It's like being suddenly rendered blind, deaf, and insensitive to feeling, after a lifetime of having full senses. It's awful."

"It's not enough. She destroyed a whole planet full of people."

"Well, what would **you** suggest?"

"When I used to write **THE LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES,** we had a place where we sent people who did things like that, a prison-planet called Takron-Galtos." Here Jim proceeded to describe the dehumanizing conditions prevalent on the prison planet.

"I can't do that to Jean," said Claremont. "I'd kill her off first."

And so it was. Jean Grey, a.k.a. Phoenix, died in **X-MEN #137.** Immediately the fans blamed Claremont for her demise. Then the above story, or a version of it, got out and they blamed Shooter instead. Who is to "blame," however, is not the issue here.

One fellow fan turned to me at said panel and, pointing to Mr. Shooter, remarked, "That man's got a lot of enemies in this room." Maybe so, but on at least part of the issue at hand, I must agree with Shooter.

The fault in the case of the Phoenix death story lies in the fact that things were allowed to get to the point at which a terrible mistake had to be corrected after the fact by whatever means were available. What **should** have happened is that when Claremont turned in the issue in which Jean

destroyed the inhabited world, editor Shooter or one of his subordinate editors or artist Byrne or even The Comics Code should have stepped in and said to him, "You can't do this!" The sequence, which even Claremont now admits was not the keenest idea he's ever had, would have been altered, and the need for Phoenix's eventual demise removed. As it was, there was no way to believably reincarnate the "asparagus" folk, and the former Marvel Girl paid for "her" crime with her life.

"The bottom line is this," said Shooter at the panel, "**my** heroes don't do things like that—and get away with it."

Without the benefit of verbal inflection, there are several ways that statement could be taken. By "my" heroes, Shooter did not mean that Marvel's characters were now his personal property in his capacity as head of the company, answerable only to James Galton and Stan Lee. He meant it in the same sense that you or I would refer to the Marvel super-heroes as "mine." "My" heroes are the characters who are heroes to me. In other words, Shooter was saying that no character can act in such a manner and still be considered by him, or by us, to be a hero. "And get away with it" does not mean that heroes should make a habit of being punished when they perform villainous acts; rather, they should not perform said acts in the first place.

I agree with this view wholeheartedly. Indeed, my

ITS DIAMETER IS A MILLION MILES; SURFACE TEMPERATURE, 6000° CENTIGRADE; CORE TEMPERATURE, WELL OVER 2000 TIMES THAT-- 14 MILLION DEGREES!
NORMALLY, THIS STAR COULD EXPECT TO 'LIVE' FOR ANOTHER SIX BILLION YEARS.
IN REALITY, ITS FUTURE CAN BE MEASURED IN A MATTER OF MINUTES...
...AS IT IS SUDDENLY, COMPLETELY, CONSUMED BY DARK PHOENIX.
©1981 Marvel Comics Group

Dark Phoenix's Dastardly Deed: "Not the keenest idea..."

major complaint is that Shooter and his many predecessors as editor at Marvel here, whether by neglect or unavoidable circumstance, allowed such miscarriages of justice to happen before. None was quite so blatant as Phoenix's mass murder of a world's entire population, so none was noticed and acted upon. But if the strict discipline advocated in this instance is to be adhered to, more characters than Jean Grey are in need of punishment, and more writers and editors than Claremont and Shooter should have their wrists slapped by the fans.

An adherence to the letter of the law of The Comics Code, to apply that written set of moral commandments in the absence of any given editor's debatable moral dictums [which is not to say that editors as a species have no morals—heaven forfend—but merely that a written set of rules is more easily referred to than the vague tuggings of individual conscience, which are always open to debate. If you doubt this, ask a gent called Moses], gives us villains who end up either deceased or incarcerated at the end of each issue, as punishment for their misdeeds. Comics writers and editors, of courcourse, are allowed to reinterpret these rules for practical purposes: villains need only be punished or killed at the end of a several-issue storyline, not at the end of each issue, and they almost always return to menace the hero anew. Sometimes, if they're not very bad villains, they even escape altogether, and no one at The Code office complains. These, however, are villains. We expect them to be mean, nasty, and have few or no redeeming qualities.

Heroes, on the other hand, are the white hats, the good guys; they are **us** in super-hero guise. Of course, it is unrealistic to have the protagonists of a series of stories portrayed as utterly faultless angels, even though they are on the side of said angels. But the operative word here is "unrealistic." Super-heroes are not themselves realistic characters. They are larger than life; everything happens to them on a grand scale. They win big, lose big, fall in love big, and suffer big. Just ask your friendly neighborhood Spider-Man. As such, they are role models for the readers. Now granted, few of the living anachronisms known as "the older fans" [me included] need role models in comic books at this stage of the game. If the argument, so often stated at rabid PTA lynch-meetings, that "there are innocent children reading these things" doesn't move you, how about this: Wasn't it nice to have such role models in the comics when we **were** young and innocent and inexperienced enough to be so influenced?

Superman, an immensely powerful being who could [when I was young, at least] push the Earth out of its orbit on a whim, had a sacred code against killing any living thing—a code that extended beyond human life to animals, plants, alien beings, insects, and even microbes. Batman, the fearsome Darknight Detec-

AND IN ANOTHER SECTION OF THE PRISON...
WELL, IF IT AIN'T THE GREAT LEGIONNAIRES, COME TO PAY US LOWLY HANDMAIDENS A CALL! WHAT HAPPENED, SATURN GIRL? GET CAUGHT JAY-WALKING?
WHAT WORKING CONDITIONS! I THOUGHT WASHBOARDS WENT OUT 1,000 YEARS AGO!
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The horrible fate from which Jean was spared by her writer's decision to kill her instead: washing clothes by hand! (A look at Takron-Galtos from *ADVENTURE #360.)*

tive, refuses to carry a gun. Spider-Man was driven to combat crime because "with great power must come great responsibility," yet he found time to be kind to his aged Aunt May. Flash and Green Lantern always battled their unscrupulous foes by the Marquis of Queensbury rules. Thor, himself a pagan deity, was moved to commiserate with a little girl whose father was serving in Viet Nam, and to sermonize to a group of hippies on the dangers of "dropping out" of society. Maybe I was just naive, and maybe I still am, but I got something out of all that.

If, on the other hand, our heroes [Shooter's "my" heroes, remember?] are just ordinary beings like you or me, with feet of clay, who shrink from adversity, who engage in petty games of one-upmanship, who are not sustained in times of trial by any belief in a power greater than themselves [not necessarily religion, but a personal code of honor of some kind], who can commit villainous acts for whatever reason and be excused because "they didn't mean it," "it was an accident," "and besides, they're the heroes," then they are not worthy of our respect or our loyal readership. None of the heroes named in the last paragraph has any strong religious affiliation in the traditional sense, but it is, or was, always clear that they believed in something. They need not have been as close to the character of Jesus Christ as the Silver Surfer to share the sentiments often expressed by Reed Richards at the conclusion of an an early **FF** story. Even the near-omnipotent Watcher once stated that the universe contained but a single all-powerful being, whose "only weapon is love." All this goodness can be cloying if it is overdone, and a hero who never stops to consider whether his course is the right one may seem a touch megalomanical. The fact that, when his meditations are done, he chooses the right path is the inalterable conclusion, though.

Let's consider a protagonist with very little control of his actions or fear for their results: The Hulk. As a near mindless [actually, just severely retarded] monster, The Hulk does not deliberately choose all those abandoned tenements to demolish in his fits of rage. It is, naturally, unrealistic that no one is ever hurt during one of his periodic rampages through a populated area. But consider: how long would The Hulk, or his hapless alter ego, Bruce Banner, hold our sympathies for his plight if he truly caused the deaths of all those unwitting bystanders?

This was why I was never in favor of Marvel's beginning a line of monster comics in the early 1970s, or of that line's subsequent incorporation with the mainline super-hero stories. There were exceptions, usually the higher quality series in the line: Dracula was the villain of his strip, and was opposed by a group of heroes; Man-Thing was completely mindless and nonetheless was always manipulated to become an instrument of justice against the true villains and thus was a protector of the innocent. Some of the other characters, though, violated the moral rule of comics, and justly, their series are no longer with us today. Morbius the Living Vampire, while an excellent Spider-Man antagonist, could only be regarded as a hero while he, like Spidey himself, held back from the dark uses to which his power could be put. When he succumbed and retained his own life at the cost of others', he became a character who could not be a hero of his own series.

Similarly, when in a recent issue, The She-Hulk allowed a car she was holding aloft to fall and cripple her adversary for life, with the excuse that her

strength is fading and she can no longer carry the burden, she becomes a character with whom I can no longer sympathize. When Galactus demolished a world so that he himself could live, he became no less a villain than Dr. Doom in my eyes, for all of his lofty speeches about being "above mere good and evil." When any of Michael Fleisher's protagonists, be it The Spectre, The Ghost Rider, or Atlas' short-lived Morlock, sends those he considers evil-doers (or in Morlock's case, anyone who happens to be standing nearby!) to a grisly death, I was shocked and appalled and I continued reading only to see if, perhaps, the writer would come to his senses and either claim "it was all a dream" or cause equal horrific vengeance to be meted out against the so-called "hero."

"An eye for an eye" is not the model of justice, either, but it is at least preferable to seeing characters we are supposed to admire and emulate behaving in an immoral or amoral manner, and being allowed to "get away with it" on the grounds that they are "the good guys," so labelled solely because the comic book bears their name on the masthead. Unrealistic? Then so were Richard Nixon, Idi Amin, the CIA, and Adolf Hitler...to name a few villains whose actions were tolerated because theirs were the names on the boss' office door.

Or to change the emphasis of Jim Shooter's original comment: "My **heroes** don't do things like that—." Not if they are to remain heroes.

THE LAST BATMAN STORY?

Later that same panel, **X-MEN** artist John Byrne was asked which characters he would be interested in illustrating in the event that he someday moved his base of operations from Marvel to DC Comics. "Green Lantern, and Superman," came his prompt reply.

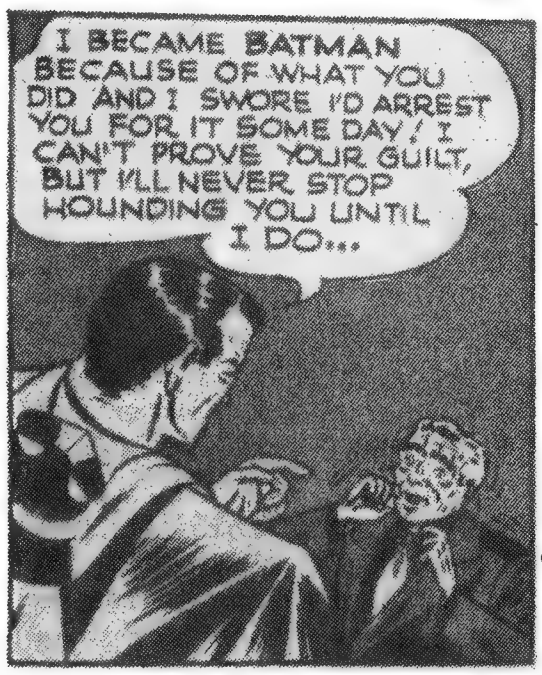
"But what about Batman?" asked another fan.

"I've already done Batman," Byrne explained, "when I drew the first book in the **UNTOLD LEGEND OF THE BATMAN** series earlier this year." [Jim Aparo, fans will remember, did the honors on the other two volumes in that mini-series.]

"You see," Byrne continued, "I consider the story in which he fulfills his original motivation and catches up with his parents' killer to be the last Batman story. That's the end of Batman; there's no reason for him to go on being Batman after that. And when I got to redraw that story as part of the **UNTOLD LEGEND** book, it relieved me of any desire to draw Batman again. I've drawn the last Batman story, and that's all there is to say about the character, as far as I'm concerned."

Now I don't know about you out there, but this fascinates the Hell out of me, as a fan and as a writer! Even considering the fact that the story to which Byrne refers had two equally dramatic sequels years later, one in which Batman caught up with the man who secretly **hired** the killer of his parents to do the dastardly deed, and another in which Batman and Deadman run afoul of the killer's **brother,** his statement stands, because it holds truth for Byrne himself as his personal viewpoint. For him, there is a Last Batman Story, and all subsequent tales of the Caped Crusader are somewhat superfluous, even unnecessary, taking on the status of **WHAT IF**s, or Imaginary Stories, as in **"What If Batman Had Continued To Fight Crime After He Caught His Parents' Killer?"**

Which leads me to the speculation: what would be


I BECAME BATMAN BECAUSE OF WHAT YOU DID AND I SWORE I'D ARREST YOU FOR IT SOME DAY! I CAN'T PROVE YOUR GUILT, BUT I'LL NEVER STOP HOUNDING YOU UNTIL I DO...
©1981 DC Comics

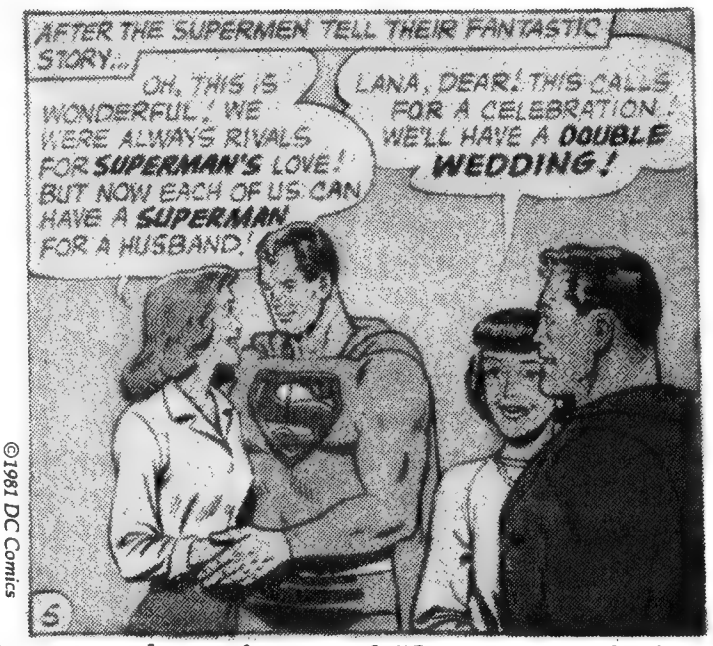
The Last Batman Story: According to John Byrne, "... there's no reason for him to go on being Batman..."

the Last Batman Story, to take the Byrnian viewpoint, of some of the other popular super-characters? Comics series **do** end, now and again. Some are left open-ended and never resolved after the cancellation of a title; some heroes later return to tie up their tangled plot-threads in some other hero's magazine. Still others—all too rare—have last issues that are **really** Last Issues, as in **DOOM PATROL #121,** wherein the four main characters were killed off, or **MAN-THING #22** (first series) in which the true relationship between The Man-Thing cast of characters and writer Steve Gerber is both explained and terminated. But what about the characters who seem destined to go on forever, like The Batman? What might their last stories be like?

A bit of speculative thought leads us to the conclusion that the more complex the character, the greater number of possibilites there are for his final story. For example, what would constitute the Last Superman Story? Batman exists to avenge his parents' deaths, and thereafter (presumably) to war on all criminals, especially those in Gotham City.

Superman, however, is not driven by vengeance. He exists to help his fellow man by dint of his superhuman powers and abilities. The Last Superman Story, then, would be one in which the Man of Steel either dies [whether or not he leaves an heir would be immaterial; it would still be the last story of "our" Superman] or cures all the world's ills and retires.

Ring a bell, anyone? We have already seen both these incarnations of the final Superman tale. One appeared in **SUPERMAN #162, "The Amazing Story of Superman-Red and Superman-Blue."** In that tale, our hero was split into two separate Supermen, each a hundred times more brilliant than the original, and was thus able to solve any puzzle. He defanged Kryptonite, rebuilt the planet Krypton [and enlarged the bottle-city of Kandor on it], transported Lori Lemaris' people [and presumably Aquaman's as well] to a planet of their own, ended all war and crime on Earth by means of an anti-evil ray [?!], and even married both of his dream girls, Lois Lane and Lana Lang [since there were two Supermen, no bigamy was involved]. After that story, there was quite simply nothing left for Superman to do. His robots were empowered to avert such natural disasters as might occur, but Superman-Blue, who remained on Earth with his wife Lana, retired to his laboratory to become a scientist like his father Jor-El. Superman-Red and his bride Lois went to New Krypton to live happily ever after. The other Last Superman Story also appeared in the early 1960s, **SUPERMAN #149**'s **"The Death of Superman."** In it, a supposedly-reformed Lex Luthor succeeded in tricking our hero into a Kryptonite death-trap, and murdered him. The world mourned Superman, and Supergirl avenged and succeeded him, but no one could truly replace the fallen hero. In case you're wondering how both these stories could have been printed, since their plot-lines


AFTER THE SUPERMEN TELL THEIR FANTASTIC STORY...
OH, THIS IS WONDERFUL! WE WERE ALWAYS RIVALS FOR SUPERMAN'S LOVE! BUT NOW EACH OF US CAN HAVE A SUPERMAN FOR A HUSBAND!
LANA, DEAR! THIS CALLS FOR A CELEBRATION! WE'LL HAVE A DOUBLE WEDDING!
©1981 DC Comics

To ensure the perfection of *"Superman Red/Blue,"* Kurt Schaffenberger was called in to draw Lois' and Lana's faces.

THE FOLLOWING DAY, AS STEVE DAYTON'S YACHT SPEEDS OVER THE HIGH SEAS...
THERE IT IS, MR. DAYTON! THE OCEAN FLOOR IS STILL BOILING! I WOULDN'T GET IN ANY CLOSER!
YOU WILL, CAPTAIN -- OR YOU'LL FIND ANOTHER JOB!
©1981 DC Comics

The final fate of The Doom Patrol. A real "Last story."

were mutually exclusive [not to mention the fact that we are obviously still enjoying Superman's exploits to this day] they were of course Imaginary Stories. which never "really happened" to the DC heroes.

Having drawn or written or even **read** either or both of the above stories, would you still feel like drawing or writing new **"Superman"** stories? It does strain the old brain to conceive of anything that could be done to match these two Herculean efforts of storytelling. The **"Death"** tale wrote the hero a beautiful and fitting epitaph; the only way he could more nobly perish would be, Christ-like, to lay down his life for another. The **"Superman Red/Blue"** story not only answered every conceivable question ever raised in the Superman mythos, but also effectively retired every other super-hero in the DC Universe at the same time. Now that was a last story what am a Last Story! Luckily Curt Swan and the many other **"Supes"** artists and writers then and since then were not affected by either story as the **"Batman"** tale affected John Byrne.

What about some of the other super-celebrated characters of comics? Were any of their books to be cancelled tomorrow, what would the last issue look like? What would **you** do given the chance to pen that final story?

Would Bruce Banner be cured, never again to metamorphosize into the green-skinned alter ego? Or would he be killed, perhaps, while in his Bruce Banner identity, in expiation of the "sins" of his rampaging other self? Or would Banner and The Hulk become permanently separated into two individuals, like Supermans Red and Blue?

Would Spider-Man finally catch a stray bullet? Or would it be possible for him to forget his oppressive altruistic vow in favor of a vow of matrimony? Since Spidey can never have the power to wipe out all crime, as Superman did in his Last Story, and since his catching the murderer of his Uncle Ben was ac-

GAZE NOW UPON A CEREMONY NEVER BEFORE SEEN ON THIS PLANET...THE AWESOME AMAZON RITE OF RENUNCIATION!
I HEREBY RELINQUISH ALL MYSTIC SKILLS! I LAY UPON THE SACRED ALTAR THE GLORIES OF THE AMAZONS AND WILLINGLY CONDEMN MYSELF TO THE TRAVAILS OF MORTALS!
MAY THE GODS BE MERCIFUL TO ME!
THUS IT SHALL BE DONE!
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The Last Wonder Woman Story: "...she always seems to come back..."

complished way back in his origin tale and only served to heighten his desire to fight crime, unlike the Byrne **"Batman"** scenario, it seems there is no "out" for the web-spinner save death or voluntary retirement. And we all know in our hearts that Spidey will never retire unless he loses his powers or becomes enfeebled by old age. After all, "With great power..." Oh, you've heard that one, eh?

What could the Last Wonder Woman Story possibly contain? One could write a veritable treatise on this topic alone. Does the Amazon Princess return forever to Paradise Island, never again to mix in the affairs of Man's World? Does she forego her powers and heritage, and live out her days as plain [?!] Diana Prince? We've seen her try both of these courses of action, and not in Imaginary Stories either, and she always seems to come back, as the traditional super-powered character, to her old familiar role. Perhaps the final Wonder Woman adventure would involve her marriage to Steve Trevor, who, despite his several reincarnations, must be as tired of waiting as Lois Lane. [Herein lies the basis of the character flaw which could, and probably will, serve as the basis for a whole column of discussion in the future: Can anyone out there honestly picture Wonder Woman as a wife and/or mother—the same Wonder Woman who is an Amazon and comes from a magical island on which women not only rule, but are the sole inhabitants? **WW** is a fatal step beyond Women's Liberation into full-fledged sexual isolationism. Can an Amazon ever truly marry? Will Steve ever get her to the altar, to say nothing of the bedroom? Who shot J.R.? [Whoops, wrong soap opera.]]

Of course, there aren't really any last stories, in the full sense of the term. We all know that the last comics story will appear in **COMICS FEATURE**, and in **THE COMICS JOURNAL**, and in **THE COMIC READER**,and it is the story whose headline reads: **"All Comic Book Companies Close Up Shop Forever."** Only when there are no more comics to publish their adventures will there be no more comics characters.

But just for the fun of it, why not try to write the ultimate [meaning final, not necessarily greatest] adventures of your favorite character? This is not a contest, Odin forbid, but an exercise in speculation. If any of you have any ideas about the subject [just ideas or brief plot synopses, mind, not full scripts which I don't have the time to read], why not send them along to this writer at the address at the end of this column or in care of this magazine? I'll devote a future column to your ideas, and a further discussion of the Byrne hypothesis. I'm not giving away T-shirts or anything, please note, so if you feel you have a fabulous idea which you may sell to the movies someday and make yourself a fortune, by all means keep it to yourself. If you just have a fun speculation you'd like to share with a wider audience, however, feel free to send it along.

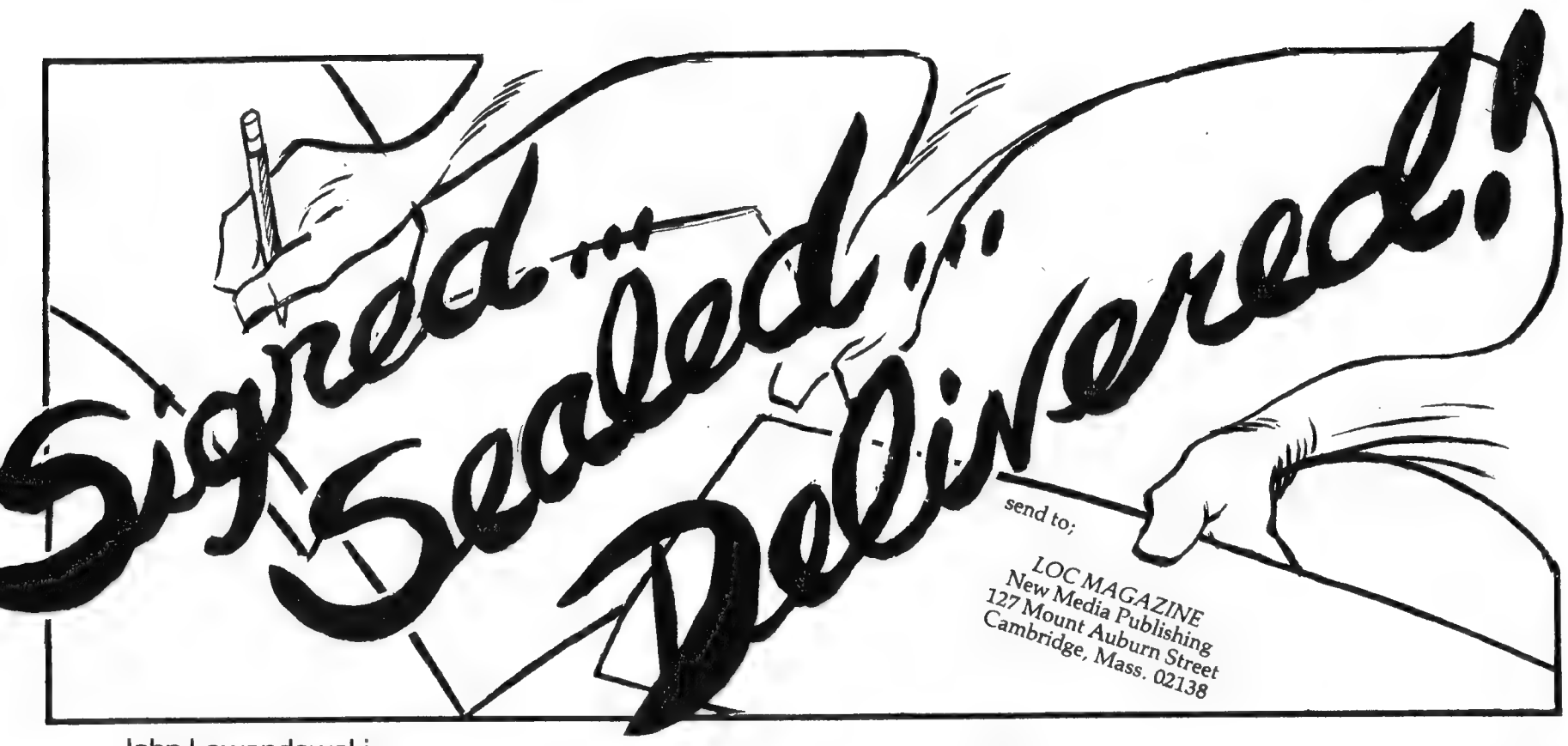
A few ground rules: No simple death stories. Anyone can stop a bullet. No so-and-so-Man solves all the world's ills stories, **a la "Superman Red/Blue,"** because that's been done. And no unnecessarily gross speculations, if you please. Being a secretly gross person, much as the stories repel me in the actual comics themselves [see the previous portion of this column], I've already thought of all the really good ones.

Be here next time for more idle speculations, and possibly some feedback on last issue's installment.

Who knows what strange things I'll overhear at next year's conventions? •

Send Your "Last Story" Suggestions to;

Murray R. Ward
PO Box 3693
Winnipeg Manitoba CANADA
R2W 3R6



John Lewandowski
Jersey City, NJ

People,

The first issue did little to impress me, but that was to be expected with the first issue of just about anything. I realize you've got a lot to learn about what to put in the magazine, so I figured I'd write. Although I didn't care for **#1**, I still **firmly** believe in what **LOC** stands for.

I know this being your first issue prevented you from running letters from your average reader, but please give the average guy a chance in future issues. **Please** don't depend on "the big names" for your book. After all, this book is everybody's chance to be heard. Let the average people have their say.

Actually, John, that being our first issue prevented us from running letters from anybody, be they big name or small (and whatever those classifications are worth, anyway). Don't be misled by our letter motif into blurring our articles (which are designed to inspire some reaction) from our letters section (which was not in #1 but is here now).

And as far as your real point goes: we'd be glad to let the average people have their say. If they've got something to say, send it right here to LOC. •

Bryan Uhlenbrock
Richmond CA

Dear Letter editors,

Congratulations are definitely in order for the premier issue of **LOC**. To my mind, you have produced the most interesting fan/pro-zine in many a moon, attaining a level of controversy reached only by [name of magazine deleted]—without indulging in the mud-slinging so prevalent in [their] bile-soaked pages. I didn't even mind the fact that your cover illo had previously appeared in your competitor's magazine... it is, after all, an exceptionally powerful piece, and deserves to surface in as many places as Miller & Austin can induce to cough up the coinage. It reminds me in no small measure of an old **STAR TREK** episode, wherein Kirk and a few crewfolk find themselves in a parallel universe, a board a barbarously-inclined Enterprise. 'Twas also an appropriate companion to one of your capstone articles: **"The Wonder Woman Who Wasn't."**

I must say that Tom Linehan appears to be the funniest fan cartoonist to surface since Fred Hembeck. **"Letterhack's Nightmares #5"** had me rolling in my bean-bag chair. Let's see more such nightmares... especially numbers one through four.

I have some serious disagreements with Kurt Busiek's article, **"When Titans Clash."** First, I think the notion [that any successful supergroup must follow the pattern laid down by a previous sales success] is so much nonsense. It encourages copycatting, which certainly needs no encouragement in comic book circles. It ignores the fact that Stan Lee was doing something radically different when he first created **The Fantastic Four**—had Stan followed Kurt's line of thinking and simply formed an ersatz Justice League [as Martin Goodman instructed] there might very well have never been a Marvel Comics Group. It also takes no notice of the line-straddling success of The Defenders [a mixture of "big guns" and second-bananas who clash as often as they co-operate] and the surprising failures of The Invaders [Type 1 of Busiek's Varieties of the Successful Super-Team] and The Inhumans [Type 2 of same—with the added benefit of

having been birthed in the pages of **THE FANTASTIC FOUR**, its supposed prototype].

Additionally, Kurt's choice of words is at times quite unfortunate. He tells us, for example, that "The Metal Men all had the same power." Oh, really? I'd always thought that each Metal Man had the attributes of his or her particular metal, and thus that the abilities of Mercury were fundamentally unlike those of, say, Gold. The powers of Lead and Tin were as different as their personalities, and the same is true of Iron and Platinum. This is a minor matter... we know what Kurt really meant even if he didn't express himself as clearly as he might have... but the next lapse he commits is far more serious. Not only does he inform us that Starfire learned the English language "through attempted rape," but he also states that Changeling "wants to be raped[!]" Now, while I have been guilty of outlandish over-

Kurt Busiek's article on THE NEW TEEN TITANS moved many fans to write. Kurt strikes again on the subject of DC Comics in this issue, with *"The Many Virtues of Lois Lane."*

statements myself a time or three, I think Kurt overstated himself into the next **hemisphere** on this one. A single stolen kiss, no matter how lusty its delivery, does not constitute attempted rape! Coupled with that smirk about the Changeling [which, far from being the amusing role-reversal that it was evidently intended to be, only serves to reinforce an ugly untruth], the entire passage strikes me as being highly questionable. A serious matter such as rape should not be trivialized so casually!

Richard Howell's article on **"The School of Comics Over-Writing"** barely scratched the surface of its chosen subject. Hopefully, this will be a continuing feature in **LOC**—there are volumes that could be written on this topic without once recapping or belaboring the obvious. Strangely, most of today's comics scripters seem unable to finish a single volume without doing both. It's amazing how they manage to both overwrite and underwrite at the same time [and I speak here of the repetitive plotting in most comics, rather than of some bizarre scheme to insure super-heroes against costumed casualty and larcenous liability].

I must confess that I hold little sympathy for the theory Murray Ward advances in **"The Wonder Woman Who Wasn't."** Why must Wonder Woman's entire history be re-written simply because Gardner Fox neglected to realize that she should have retained her powers in **JLA #2**? Continuity is one thing; but fictional reality, omniversal awareness, and totally revising an established character in order to explain occasional discrepancies is something else entirely. My own explanation for the inconcistencies in Wonder Woman's forty-year history? Simple. We all know that magic is highly dependent on belief—if you believe in it, magic works; if you don't, it won't. We also know [thanks to Cary Bates' work in various issues of **THE FLASH**] that comics writers here on Earth-Prime are, in some way that has not yet been fully explained, able to affect reality on Earths One, Two, and A through Z. It is my opinion that, if Earth-Prime scripter Gardner Fox honestly believes that shifting dimensions will cause Wonder Woman to lose her powers along with the rest of her Justice League comrades, then she will indeed lose her powers. If Robert Kanigher believes that Wonder Woman, Wonder Girl, Wonder Tot, and even Wonder Queen are all the same person at different times in her life, and that all three/four can magically co-exist without straining dimensional matrices [to say nothing of the readers' credibility] beyond the breaking point, then lo and behold! There they all are on the printed page, and the universe is none the worse for war. Really, people, let's stop chasing our four-colored tails with pointless inanities and get down to cases. These illustrated fantasies say a lot about us, culturally as well as psychogically. Why waste our time on meaningless nonsense when

there are so many diamonds to be gleaned from the rubble?

I suppose I should say something about James Van Hise's mini-article, **"Alternative Thoughts."** Very well, I will be brief: I don't think the fellow writes very well. One quick example—towards the end of his allotted space, he states, "**MARVEL TEAM-UP #100** was much more like a good comic should be." Let us ignore the errors of grammar; none of us are English teachers. Let us simply note that the sentence implies a comparison, but offers not a single **bad** comic to compare with the good comic. Let us now move on to the next article, which thankfully has something to say and says it well.

"Why Women Don't Read Comics" is the sort of article I like to see and hope to see more of. [Like I said, none of us are English teachers.] Constructive criticism, examples from both inside and out of comics, illustrations that amplify rather than distract from the point of the article. Good show. Now that we know why women don't read comics, howzabout if the Kalishes, Stricklands, and Yronwodes of comicdom tell us "Why **Some** Women **Do** Read Comics"? Some of the more blatant examples of sex-role stereotyping must get awfully annoying... how do they manage to put up with it? What keeps them coming back for more? [And the first clod who answers "masochism" is hereby doomed to be haunted by the ghost of Phyllis Schlafly.]

I hope that Messrs. Phillips, Morrissey, and Sanderson will not feel slighted if I simply give them a figurative nod and continue through the book— I enjoyed each one's article [particularly Morrissey's] but do not feel particularly constrained to comment on them. Tom Linehan's cartoons on pages 46 and 47 are a different matter, however. The pair deserve eternal juxtaposition, perhaps under the title, "Two Sides to Every Story." I especially appreciated the expression on The Spirit's face while the comics writer [Chris Claremont?] rambled on and on and on...

"Your Money or Your Love" raised several interesting points: comics' collectability versus that of science-fiction magazines, color Xeroxing, and the like. I've often considered Xeroxing my more valuable comics and then selling the originals, but have not [yet] done so... for one thing, I'd probably be breaking some kind of copyright law... but I can always dream. In a similar vein...

"Some Good Reasons to Eventually Burn Your Comic Collection." Great title. Damned fine article, too, but... But Peter Gillis didn't deliver on the promise the title of his article held. I was looking forward to hearing some killer arguments in favor of pyromania—and Peter **didn't follow through!!!** Allow me, if you will, to correct his oversight.

[1] Comics collecting smacks of acquisition-for-its-own-sake. Buy something, read it once, file it away forever. This is surely indicative of some character flaw, and there are some who would [and have] labeled it anal-retentive behavior. When seen in this light, putting the torch to one's oh-so-valuable collection of newsprint is a healthy reaction.

[2] The logistics of moving a large collection fom one place to another is mind-boggling. When one is forced to move as often as I have been at various times [six legal residences in the space of two years seems to be my record thus far], 10,000+ comic books is one hell of a burden. Who says book-burning can't be liberating?

Speaking of liberation... the next item on our agenda is **"The Rape of Ms. Marvel,"** and here the potentially offending word ["rape," not "liberation"] has been used correctly. **AVENGERS #200** is a blot

Carol Strickland's article on Ms. Marvel garnered more response than any other essay in *LOC #1*. Most correspondents agreed with Carol's position on the character's ignominious fate as presented in *AVENGERS #200*.

on the good name of Marvel Comics, and the presentation of this article is an example of the sort of service **LOC** can and should perform for fandom in general. You are our forum of last resort. When the comics companies are unwilling to present criticism of this sort, you, and other publications like you, offer a valuable platform. If one were to judge solely by the letters of comment that Marvel has deigned to print on the comic in question, one would be forced to conclude that the readers were, without exception, pleased by the mysogynistic tone of that "Marvel Milestone." One misguided reader went so far as to state that, "If this keeps up, I'll have to go back to reading **PLAYBOY**. Don't get me wrong, I think the story was great...". [The preceeding appeared in its objectionable entirety in the pages of **AVENGERS #203**.] Without going into the relative merits of either **PLAYBOY** or comic books [and making only passing mention of the childishness of **PLAYBOY**'s supposedly-sophisticated audience implied by this missive], I'd like to say that this fellow must be out of his mind. One should not read a comic book expecting to find the same sort of thing one expects to find in **PLAYBOY**.

In my opinion, Ms. Strickland is incorrect only when she indicates that the mass of fandom **approved** of the comic in question. At last year's Bay-Con, held in San Francisco, Chris Claremont received enthusiatic applause for denouncing the wretched thing. Admittedly, this was in San Francisco, last bastion of human liberation in these days of Moralizing Majorities, but the fact remains that even in the Marvel offices, there is dissension. Since Ms. Strickland is a fairly vocal fan/critic, we must assume that she wrote a condemnatory letter to Marvel regarding the issue at hand. Why, then, was not a single negative opinion printed by Marvel in the lettercol devoted to **AVENGERS #200**? One might as well ask why the Veterans' Administration has not done an honest, in-depth study on the effects of Agent Orange on Viet Nam Veterans. The answer is the same either way—nobody wants to blow the whistle on themselves. Covering up is still the order of the day... sweep the whole mess under the rug and hope that nobody will notice that unsightly lump in the middle of the floor. Whatever you do, don't stand on top of it! Walk around it you fool!

Hoping you will continue to walk boldly where most fear to tread [and where [name of magazine deleted] is content to kick and writhe like an epileptic].

The true story behind the sudden popularity of pictures of Wonder Woman the Barbarian is demanded by one correspondent.

Many thanks for your long and very complete overview of issue #1, Bryan. We hope that LOC will shake many other readers into becoming writers before much longer.

To comment on your questions in order:

About our cover, well...I think the mix-up on it comes more under the classification of misunderstanding than anything else. When we approached Frank Miller for a drawing to use as a cover (at the November Newcon in Boston), he was glad to co-operate and draw us one right there—but when he heard that LOC #1 would contain a long article about Wonder Woman, he enthusiastically volunteered the drawing which became issue #1's cover. He did indeed mention to us that it had already been submitted to another magazine, but that he had gotten no word from that magazine that the drawing would be used any time in the near future (notification of which, he told us, being one of the terms of the arrangement as he then understood it), and indeed, had already decided to withdraw his permission to print the drawing. Under those circumstances, we felt no compunctions whatsoever about accepting the drawing for publication. We imagine that everybody concerned was surprised to see the same drawing appearing on the covers of two separate magazines during more or less the same month, but these mix-ups happen. Due to a coincidence, the publishers of the other

magazine found out about our printing the Miller/Austin drawing before the magazine actually was released, and called and asked us if there was any time to change it. There wasn't. Both magazines were "at the printer's," and there was nothing to be done. Everyone concerned settled back into accepting the situation on somewhat amicable terms, and we had decided to just keep our mouths shut about it (at least in print), but your assumption that Frank and/or Terry were out to sell the drawing to as many magazines as they could coaxed us to break the silence. It was not Frank's fault! It was not Frank's fault! It was not Frank's fault! Oh, and incidentally, Frank did enjoy the full-color production job we did on his Wonder Woman. He thought it made the drawing seem "richer and more complete." We'd be lying if we said we thought we didn't think so, too.

As concerns Kurt Busiek's TITANS article, we're certainly sorry that Kurt's choice of words packed some offensive punch. Occasionally we editors lose sight of what oversteps the bounds of "maintaining the tone of the article" and lapses into overstatement.

Richard Howell's series on over-writing in comics, death of the heroic image, rampant immorality, etc., technically ends in this issue, but if we know him, he'll be back on the subject again before anyone knows it. For confirmation of this, see the editorial in COMICS FEATURE #9, the massive overview of the X-MEN in THE COMICS JOURNAL #49, and...um, get him talking once or twice.

Oh, and about James Van Hise's article: Don't judge him by that one. After LOC #1 was released, James called up our publisher and wanted to know why we (the editors) had dropped a full page of his article. Why did we, you might ask? Well, we didn't. Someone dropped a page of "Alternative Thoughts" between the time James put the entire article as you saw it plus one page into an envelope to us, and the time we received it—the article that appeared in LOC #1, that is. Naturally, that page was the one during the course of which he mentioned MARVEL TEAM-UP #100. There's something lacking in any comparison in which one of two elements has been removed, right?

The already-famous "Why Women Don't Read Comics" extravaganza continues this issue. Frankly, we feel that the subject—and different aspects of the subject—is inexhaustible. Keep reading and see if you don't agree, too. And yes, the question "Why Some Women Do Read Comics" will indeed be addressed as part of the series.

The "Rape of Ms. Marvel" article drew the most mail response of any of our articles in LOC #1, and deservedly so. We were happy to be able to print Carol's article for many reasons, although we had some stylistic reservations (see our response to Darren Madigan elsewhere in this section). We're pleased to state that the response to Carol's thorough denunciation of AVENGERS #200 has been overwhelmingly positive. Maybe the editors at Marvel might gain something from that.

On the other hand, and to address one of your other points, Marvel itself claimed that the response to AVENGERS #200 was overwhelmingly positive. Perhaps the Claremont-fans in San Francisco agreed with his assessment of that issue's disposal of "his" character, but how many of them wrote into Marvel about it? Easy aphorisms aside, if you object strongly to an issue, concept, or series of issues—tell those who are responsible, or else you will be partially responsible if more of the same appears. That's one of the whole purposes of this magazine, for instance: communication.

So thanks very much for sharing your opinions of LOC #1 with us and our other readers, Bryan. Keep reading, and we're sure you'll keep writing. •

Everyone agreed that the reasons *"Why Women Don't Read Comics"* were important and well worth examining.

Darren Madigan
Syracuse, NY

Dear Rich and Carol,

Well, last night my roommate went down to Dream Daze [Syracuse's version of local comic book stores] and, seeing none of his usual fare on the shelves, picked up **COMICS FEATURE #8** and **LOC #1**. This letter is on **LOC**, though I might send another one to **CF**. Anyhow, after the two magazines got passed through the various hands here, it eventually got around to me [tho' it's a good thing Kurt [Busiek]'s away or I'd never have gotten hold of it—no, wait, he'd probably have gotten his own copy, so...] Anyhow, in case you're interested, this is what I thought of the damn thing. [Geez, someday I've got to learn how to stick to a point...]

Anyhow, the first things that springs to mind are comments on Kurt's **"Titans"** article and Carol Strickland's **"The Rape of Ms. Marvel."** I'm linking the two because I think they both suffer from the same thing: neither one of the writers talks enough about what they're supposed to be talking about. In the Ms. Marvel article, the last three pages were fine. Unfortunately, they were prefaced by two pages of vehement exposition [I was tempted to put "ranting" in there, but years of exposure to Kurt have taught me some tact, I guess] on how comic books muck over women in general. While this is a good cause and one I heartily agree with, it should have been cut, either by a great deal or in totality, simply because a] it didn't have a thing to do with **AVENGERS #200**, b] it's been done to death elsewhere, and c] having to wade through two pages of haranguing to get to the article that the title made you want to read is a good way to keep people from reading the thing in the first place. Also, the whole idea is shot down nicely towards the end by the writer's declaration that Chris Claremont is one of the only writers in comics who treats women correctly. Claremont does not treat women correctly, he treats women the way Jack Higgins and Alistair MacLean treat men, **i.e.**, all his characters are the same, with their major differences being their names and the types of weapons they like to use. Misty is different from Colleen is different from Moira is different from Storm because one uses a gun, another uses a sword, another uses a machine gun, and another hits you with a lightning bolt, etc... Claremont's characters are different types of stereotypes than Lois Lane and Sue Richards, yes—but they're still stereotypes, and they're still pretty insulting.

Kurt's article on the Titans suffered from basically the same thing—he also didn't give enough attention to what he was writing about. The Titans themselves were mentioned for about four paragraphs in all; the rest of the article was spent showing why certain teams were viable and others weren't. Granted, he tried to tie this into the Titans, but to my mind, he didn't mention them enough for us to get the message. Of course, I've heard Kurt's opinions so much that I know what he wanted to say, but others don't have that advantage. To my mind, either the article should have been constructed a lot more tightly, or, as above, it should have been split into two articles.

Moving right along [dum dum dum dum dee dee...], I guess my next point is one of those really trivial, picky things that fans love to point out. In Richard Howell's **"The School of Comics Overwriting,"** he makes incidental mention of "Jack Russell's body count." I'd simply like to say that, to my knowledge, Jack Russell never killed anyone [in Werewolf form or out] unless they were doing their level best to wipe him out first. Most of these people, in fact, who tried to see the Werewolf off the mortal coil [mortal? Let it ride...], were demons and monsters and black sorcerors and such, and except for the black sorcerors, those things don't sport a lot of humanity to start with. Other super-heroes wipe out monsters right and left. While it's not exactly kosher for a super-hero to wipe out a human, remember that the Werewolf isn't a hero. The fact that he hasn't actually killed anyone can be chalked up to either the innate goodness of Russell's soul, or direct editorial in-

WOLVERINE--GO! HE'S ALL YOURS!
YER ALL HEART, BUB THIS T ME, THOUGH, I AIN T MUCKING AROUND WITH NC CAPE!
THIS TIME I TAG THE MAN!
SKRAP
YAHRRR--!!
©1981 Marvel Comics Group

The issue of super-hero as killer continues to be a popular one among *LOC*'s readers. Pictured here is the most visible (and popular) example of that genre:Wolverine.

tervention. Either way, it seems to me that within the constraints of the book, the series was handled responsibly. Yes, the Werewolf did **try** to kill people—the fact that he didn't succeed, as well as the fact that he was never presented as a hero to be emulated in the first place, seems to me to keep it from being an irresponsible comic, as Richard implied. [Now Wolverine on the other hand, who **succeeds** in killing and who **is** presented as a hero to be emulated, is something else entirely...]

On other things: **"Some Good Reasons to Eventually Burn Your Comics Collection"** was well-written, informative, and fun, despite Gillis' tendency to be self-indulgent. Sanderson's **LOC NESS** I found enjoyable and well-written, though I do have to say that while the "Future X-Men" stories had all of the good aspects that Sanderson pointed out, they had even more flaws that he glossed over completely. I have exactly the same opinion on Van Hise's calling **MARVEL TEAM-UP #100** one of the better comics of today. Ward's Wonder Women was extremely interesting, and since I know little or nothing about the character, I have no idea whether anything he said was right or not. Kurt's Captain Universe article was extremely well-done. Carol Kalish's article on **"Why Women Don't Read Comics"** I found good but intimidating—I'm sure she didn't mean to imply that all women were cold, calculating, dissecting Vulcanoid criticism machines, but boy, was that the impression I had by the end of the article. **"Your Money or Your Love"** I have to agree with just about wholeheartedly. And, looking at the table of contents, I guess there are still some articles that I haven't read. Oh, well.

We might well agree with you about the structure, or more properly, the title of Kurt Busiek's article, Darren. It was mainly a theoretical piece about the classifications in which super-groups can fit, and The Teen Titans were in the article as one of a series of examples under discussion, albeit the closing example. About Carol Strickland's piece, though, we're not so sure you appreciated what she was trying to do. The two pages of history of treatment of women as leading characters in comics, while perhaps not necessary for an analysis of AVENGERS #200, were quite enlightening (to those who were not aware of, say, the Marvel "female-oriented" line of the early 1970s), and served to place Carol's argument in a more defensible historical perspective. As regards the "vehement exposition," there are two things to say: 1) Obviously, the subject matter (condoning rape—and in a comic book, yet!) is nothing if not that which will produce strong feeling about it, especially on the side of the denouncers. Carol's article neither sugar-coated its topic nor magnified it—in our editorial opinion. 2) You should have seen it before we edited out some of that vehemence (like, there's righteous outrage, and there's..well, the type of righteous outrage that won't really convince anybody). We stand behind every word in the printed version of Carol's article—as well as her right to say them. (Hear that, Carol? Now about that follow-up...)

Also, Darren, we wish that you had listed the "flaws" of the "Future X-Men" stories, rather than just alluding to them. If you've got reasoned (and reasonable) disagreements with any of our articles, this is the place for them.

Cold, calculating, dissecting Vulcanoid criticism machines? Darren, you toy with utter destruction. •

Steven Grant
Madison, WI

Dear Rich and Carol,

Got a bone to pick with Rich Morrissey and a statement he made on page 46 of **LOC #1**:

"...Shooter also hired fanzine editors (Roger Stern and Mark Gruenwald, the latter bringing with him several contributors to his **OMNIVERSE** such as Peter Gillis, Ralph Macchio and Steven Grant)..."

Untrue. I can't speak for Peter, but Ralph predated Mark at Marvel by some months, and Roger Stern, with whom I'd worked on **CPL**—a great old fanzine— and **CHARLTON BULLSEYE**, brought me in. Mark will be the first to tell you that neither Ralph or I are adherents to the Omniversal Theory, **whatever** it actually is, and neither of us have contributed to **OMNIVERSE**. Perhaps Rich mistook our friendship and occasional collaborations for a school of thought, but none exists. And I can't think of **any OMNIVERSE** contributor that Mark has brought into Marvel, outside of maybe Pete Poplaski, an underground cartoonist who inked backgrounds for a recent **WHAT IF...?**

Otherwise, **LOC** was interesting, if a bit directionless. Good luck with it.

As we've mentioned somewhere else lately, Steven, we're always glad to get and print corrections about factual matters that were misreported in one of our magazines. Thanks for your well-wishing, also. •

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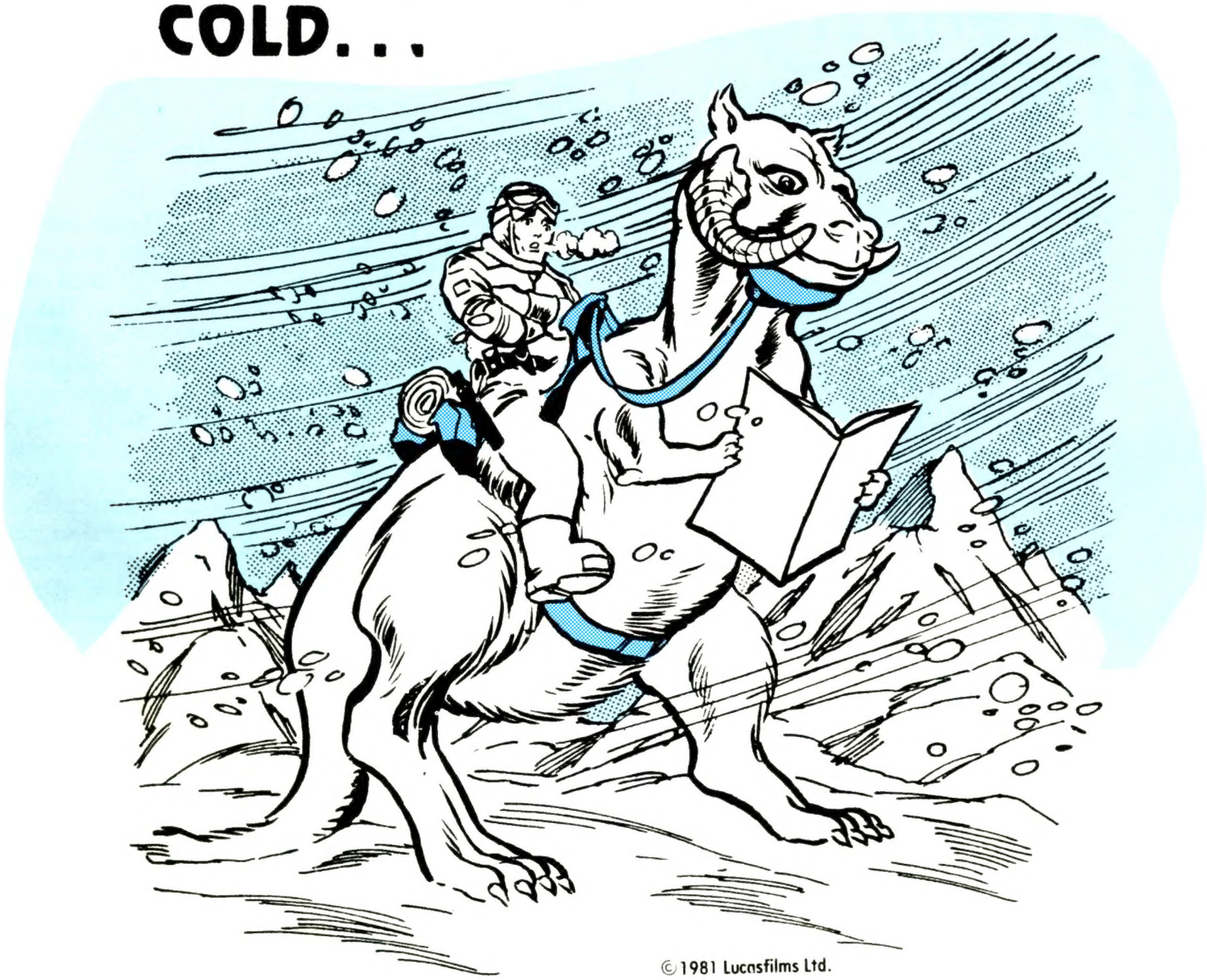

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